HISTORY OF THE GERMAN ARMY, V: THE TRIALS OF STRENGTH (1938)
Benoist-Méchin

English translation — Section 1 of 10
PDF pages 007–064
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[[PDF page 007]]

THE TRIALS OF STRENGTH
1938

With a calm eye, we consider the progress of his power, and each of us, I think, imagines that he is gaining for himself the time another takes to perish.
Demosthenes.

[[PDF page 013]]

PART ONE
THE FOUNDATION
OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

[[PDF page 015]]

BOHEMIA BEFORE 1914

With its mountains covered in thick forests, its valleys where foaming torrents leap, its churches carved like pieces of goldsmith’s work, and its villages shaded by century-old lime trees that spread around them a sweet smell of honey, Bohemia is a land so beautiful that its inhabitants have often called it “the jewel of Europe.” Since we have been separated from it by the Iron Curtain, we tend to classify it among the countries of the East, but nothing is more false. Twenty centuries of history attest that Bohemia is not only situated at the heart of the continent, but at the confluence of all the currents that move it.

According to the period and the angle from which one considers it, this quadrilateral belted by mountains on three sides and opening, on the fourth, toward the Hungarian plain, appears sometimes as a wedge driven into the right flank of Germany, whose unity and vital centers it threatens; sometimes as a refuge of Slavism, dangerously hemmed in between Silesia and Austria, those two advances of Germanism toward the east, which seem to wish to close upon it and engulf it. It is here that the line of demarcation between Germans and Slavs became stabilized, from the remote times when Marcomanni and Baiuvarii checked the advance of the Avars and the Wends. Like all lands of confrontation, Bohemia has known periods of crisis and rupture, revolts and repressions perhaps more bloody and more frenzied than elsewhere, because the diversity of blood there brought passions more rapidly

[[PDF page 016]]

to incandescence. It is enough to recall the terrible Hussite wars, led by Jan Žižka during the first third of the fifteenth century, and the defenestration of the counselors of Matthias II of Habsburg, which occurred at the Hradčany on 23 May 1618. But it also benefited from long years of peace, in which its antagonistic forces, instead of tearing one another apart, braced themselves against one another in order to raise it to a higher level of civilization.

Thanks to these happy periods, the court of the kings of Bohemia became a high place of culture, architecture, and poetry. Thus Prague was endowed in 1348 with the first German university, whose influence extended over all of central Europe, and there grew, on the banks of the Moldau, a capital so beautiful that it was called the "golden city," in homage to its profusion of Gothic churches, Jesuit chapels, and baroque palaces, over whose façades there seems to pass a breath coming directly from Rome.

A significant fact: it was in Bohemia and Moravia that all the great military actions took place which helped shape the destiny of central Europe: the battle of the White Mountain (8 November 1620), where the imperial armies of Ferdinand II crushed the Protestant forces of Count Thurn and imposed upon the country the spirit of the Counter-Reformation; the siege of Prague (6 May 1757), where Frederick II defeated the armies of Prince Charles of Lorraine and confirmed the rise of the House of Brandenburg; the battle of Austerlitz (2 December 1805), where Napoleon broke the last ties which united the Habsburgs to the Holy Empire;

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1. Jan of Trocnov, called Žižka or "the One-Eyed," took the lead of Czech resistance after the death of Jan Hus, burned alive in 1415 by order of the Council of Constance. He won the battle of Anska over the Imperials, but finally was crushed and died in 1424. The Hussite wars, which lasted until 1471, were marked by massacres and scenes of unheard-of ferocity. The country emerged bloodless and devastated. It took years of effort by the Habsburgs to restore its former prosperity.

2. Founded by Emperor Charles IV of Luxembourg, the University of Prague attracted to itself a crowd of men of letters, poets, alchemists, and scholars, notably the celebrated Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe. His disciple Kepler succeeded him in the functions of official astronomer to Rudolf II.

3. Following this defeat, Ferdinand II had twenty-seven leaders of the revolt, the flower of the country's Slavic aristocracy, beheaded in Prague. He transferred the property of the rebels to the nobles who had remained faithful to his cause and ordered all Protestants to leave the country (1627). Two thousand families, it is said, had to go abroad and settle in Saxony. Since then the Czechs have regarded the battle of the White Mountain as a national disaster.

[[PDF page 017]]

the battle of Sadowa (3 July 1866), where Bismarck excluded Austria from the Germanic Confederation.

Rich in so many political and religious, racial and linguistic contrasts, Bohemia has served as the cradle of a host of striking personalities. It gave to the Church Saint Wenceslas and Saint John Nepomuk; to the camp of the Reformation, Jan Hus and Komenský; to the Germanic world, military chiefs such as Wallenstein and Radetzky, a delicate poet like Rainer Maria Rilke, and a tormented, visionary mind like Franz Kafka; to the Slavic world, political men such as Palacký, Havlíček, Rašín, and Masaryk; musicians such as Smetana and Dvořák; poets such as Kollár, Čelakovský, and Erben; historians such

as Tomek and Pekař, to cite only the best known among them.

Thus one sees that Prince Karl-Anton Rohan is not wrong in writing that “Bohemia is not only a historic land, that is, a land where much history has been made, but a hearth from which important spiritual currents have radiated.”

After having been governed successively by the Přemyslids, the princes of the House of Luxembourg, and the Jagiellons, Bohemia passed in 1526 into the hands of the Habsburgs, who were to keep it for nearly four hundred years. At the beginning, their rule was reduced to a personal union. The kingdom was a composite aggregate, formed of what were called “the Lands of the Crown of Saint Wenceslas.” These comprised, besides the duchy of Lusatia, Bohemia proper, Moravia, and Silesia. Each of these lands had its own Assembly. There existed no other bond between them than the person of the sovereign. Rudolf II had granted them in 1609 Letters of Majesty which gave Protestantism a legal existence, removed from the King the supervision of the churches, the University, and the schools, in order to entrust it to the Diets,

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2. Bishop of the Union of the Moravian Brethren, Komenský or Comenius had to leave Bohemia in 1628, when Catholicism was decreed the only official religion there. The Bible called “of Kralice,” translated by the Moravian Brethren (1579-1593), marked the advent of Czech as a national literary language.

3. His real name was Albrecht von Waldstein, born at Heřmanič in 1583, assassinated at Eger in 1634. He was one of the protagonists of the Thirty Years’ War.

4. Although Czech and Jewish, and having studied in Prague, Kafka wrote his entire work in German.

5. Karl-Anton Prinz Rohan, Heisses Eisen. Um die Länder der Böhmischen Krone, p. 113. It is in Bohemia, in fact, that linguistic nationalism, Pan-Germanism, Pan-Slavism, and National Socialism first took shape.

[[PDF page 018]]

proclaimed freedom of conscience and of worship, and established a certain number of “Defenders,” also designated by the Diets, whose role consisted in ensuring respect for the Letters of Majesty.

For nearly six hundred years, the supranational character of the monarchs who wore the crown of Bohemia enabled them to play the role of arbiters and conciliators between the different ethnic and religious groups that divided the country among themselves. But this always precarious equilibrium was difficult to maintain. It did not long survive the ruin of the universalist principles that had made the cohesion and greatness of the Middle Ages. In the aftermath of the battle of the White Mountain, Ferdinand II of Habsburg had the Letters of Majesty thrown into the fire and decreed Catholicism the only official religion (1627). He removed the University of Prague and, in general, all teaching from the control of the Diets and handed them over to the Jesuits. A century and a half later, Joseph II instituted a Civil Code, whose aim was to realize the absolute unity of language and civilization of the different “nations” included within the frontiers of his monarchy. He declared German the official language of the Empire, thus relegating Czech to the rank of a subordinate idiom.

Although tempered, on the religious plane, by the Edict of Toleration of 1781, this attempt at

Germanization had harmful consequences. It provoked a revival of Czech nationalism and led the Slavs of Bohemia to become more keenly conscious of their kinship with the non-Germanic populations of the Empire. But this was still only a slight shock. It was above all after the Wars of Liberation of 1813 and the awakening of nationalities that accompanied the revolution of 1848 that the German-Czech antagonism took a new turn and manifested itself in an increasingly accentuated form.

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1. Following the Golden Bull, promulgated by Charles IV of Luxembourg in 1356, which made the King of Bohemia the first of the lay Electors of the Empire, the Letters of Majesty were in some sort the fundamental charter of Bohemian liberties.

2. This measure of “unification” earned him the applause of the French Encyclopedists, who knew nothing of the ethnic complexity of the countries of central Europe.

[[PDF page 019]]

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During the first fortnight of March 1848, the European chancelleries learned with stupefaction that riots had broken out in Vienna, that the Austrian cabinet had been overthrown, and that Metternich had had to leave his palace on the Ballhausplatz precipitately in order not to be torn to pieces by the crowd. The revolutionary blaze, springing from the paving stones of Paris, had spread not only to Vienna, but to Berlin, Dresden, Stuttgart, and Munich. Along the way it had taken on such violence that it risked dislocating the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The peoples placed under the scepter of the Habsburgs had quickly seized the opportunity that these events brought them. The Croats had assembled in National Assembly at Karlovitz. Kossuth and Dembinski had unleashed an insurrection in Budapest. Garibaldi had stirred up great ferment in the Milanese. Croats, Slovenes, Italians, and Hungarians loudly demanded their emancipation.

The Czechs had not remained behind in this race toward liberty. As early as 11 March, they had assembled in Congress at the Wenzelsbad in Prague and had addressed a petition to Emperor Ferdinand I in which they demanded the full restoration of their “historic rights.” Their demands bore essentially on the following four points: 1) administrative union of the different lands composing Bohemia (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia); 2) establishment of a common Diet, sitting alternately in Prague and Brünn (Brno); 3) equality of the Czech and German languages in administration and in

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1. “No other city in Europe remained as long as Vienna under the sign of revolution,” writes Helmut Sündermann, “and no other was, until November 1848, the theater of more violent spiritual and material conflicts. If one held only to the barricades, the street battles, the sieges, and the shootings, Vienna would appear as the center of the European revolutionary movement of that period. Nowhere else did so much blood flow.” (Das dritte Reich, p. 88.)

2. The claim of the “historic rights of the Crown of Bohemia” rests upon the assertion that it preserved them legally intact when, in 1526, it united with the other “Lands” governed by the House of Habsburg.

3. Since Bohemia comprised approximately three million Germans and six million Czechs, the latter would have held the majority within the single parliament.

[[PDF page 020]]

education throughout the territory; 4) obligation for all officials to know these two languages.

Resolutely opposed to any reform of this kind, the Germanic minority had reacted vigorously. A few weeks later, the delegates of one hundred German towns in Bohemia had assembled in congress at Teplitz-Schönau, under the presidency of Mr. Strache, burgomaster of Tetschen, and had adopted by show of hands the following motion: “We formally oppose the creation of a single bilingual Diet for all of Bohemia and repudiate the fusion of ethnic groups that results from maintaining the old historic frontiers. These are a relic of the past that must be liquidated as quickly as possible. In their place, we demand: 1) the right to administer ourselves, through the establishment of communal councils elected by direct and universal suffrage; 2) the abolition of representation by Lands, as it currently exists in the Parliament of Vienna; 3) its replacement by a representation of Districts of the Empire (Reichskreise), scrupulously respecting linguistic frontiers and directly attached to the central power.” One month later, the General Union of the Germans of Bohemia sent an address to the Minister of Justice in Vienna in which its members demanded the establishment of a strict separation between German districts and Czech districts. This was the first time that the Germans of Bohemia had formulated such a demand, and the Viennese cabinet thought it could ignore it.

But things were not going to remain there.

On 30 March 1848, a “Preparatory Greater German Parliament” had met at Mannheim. Its president, Mr. Soiron, had announced there the imminent convocation, at Frankfurt, of a constituent assembly to which all the “Lands” belonging or having belonged to the Germanic Empire would be invited to send delegates. From Schleswig to southern Styria, this news had aroused extraordinary enthusiasm. But—significant fact—while the representatives of all the German-speaking Lands had flocked to the banks of the Main, the Czechs had responded with

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1. Cf. Hans Krebs, Kampf in Böhmen, p. 19-20. This is why Hans Krebs calls the Congress of Wenzelsbad “the first Assembly of the German people of Bohemia.”

[[PDF page 021]]

a categorical non possumus. In a letter addressed on 11 April 1848 to President Soiron, their spokesman František Palacký had justified their abstention in terms that today take on a prophetic character:

“You know,” he wrote to him, “what colossal Power occupies the eastern portion of our continent, and you also know that its power grows from year to year. Unassailable from within, it adopts an attitude every day more threatening toward its neighbors and tends to set itself up as a universal monarchy. This is an immeasurable evil, a nameless calamity... This danger is all the more disquieting because the entire southeast of Europe is occupied by a certain number of peoples, none of whom is strong enough to stand up to it alone. They will be able to check Tsarist ambitions only if they unite under the scepter of the Habsburgs. That is why it would be criminal to weaken Austria... In truth, if the Austrian imperial state did not exist, it would be necessary to hurry to create it, in the interest of Europe and of all humanity... Imagine the Austro-Hungarian monarchy broken up into a dust of republics! How that would facilitate Russian penetration into Europe, and what a formidable springboard it would represent for the establishment of its hegemony over the continent! That is why we must never allow Vienna to

fall to the rank of a provincial capital, and if there are people foolish enough there to prefer to have Frankfurt for capital, one can only cry out: ‘Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do!’”

It is therefore not toward Frankfurt, but toward Vienna that

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2. Shortly before, Palacký had published a History of the Czech People, which had had a great impact in the Slavophile circles of Bohemia. Seeking to give his compatriots a philosophical interpretation of their past, he had depicted their history to them as “a permanent martyrdom, caused by their age-old struggle against the Germans.”

3. Palacký is alluding to the Russian seizure of Poland and to the undisguised designs of the Government of Saint Petersburg upon Galicia, Ruthenia, Bessarabia, and Dobruja.

4. “If Vienna does not wish one day to find itself on the frontiers of Russia,” Julius Fröbel wrote at the same period, “it must become the center of a system of federated states, which must extend from the mouths of the Rhine to the mouths of the Danube.” (K. A. Rohan, Volk und Staat, Sudetendeutscher Erzieherbrief, July 1963, p. 5.) “Our age,” remarks Helmut Sündermann on his side, “has been able to observe that the Danubian peoples were happier under the scepter of Vienna than previously under the domination of the Sultans, or today under that of Moscow.” (Das dritte Reich, 1964, p. 84.)

[[PDF page 022]]

Palacký turns his eyes “as toward the only center capable of bringing his people hope and peace.” What is being prepared on the banks of the Main? The unity of the German nation? That is an undertaking that in no way concerns the Czechs and with which they cannot associate themselves in any fashion. “The whole world knows well,” Palacký continues, “that the German Emperors never had anything to do, as such, with the people of Bohemia, and that they never exercised in that country either legislative power, judicial power, or even executive power. The ties woven by history between Germany and Bohemia were never direct relations from people to people, but simple relations from sovereign to sovereign...”

The refusal formulated by Palacký so faithfully reflects the feeling of his compatriots that when the German constituent assembly meets on 18 May under the vaults of the Paulskirche of Frankfurt, one sees there one hundred and thirty delegates from the Habsburg Empire. They represent there all the Germanic populations of the Dual Monarchy. But the Slavic districts of Bohemia send no one.

Yet Palacký has no illusions about Austria’s real strength. He knows well that it is not able to check the advance of the Russian colossus unless it transforms itself profoundly. “If Metternich has fallen,” he asserts, “it is not so much because he was the worst enemy of liberty as because he was irreducibly hostile to all the Slavic nationalities included in the Monarchy.” Austria has taken the wrong road since the battle of the White Mountain. Let it change course! Let it abandon the abusive centralization inaugurated by Joseph II! Let it renounce imposing the tutelage of 13 million Germans upon its 40 million non-German subjects! By becoming a federative and multinational state and by assuming the defense of all the Slavic populations distributed in the east of Europe—Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Slovenes, Serbs, Poles of Galicia, Ruthenians, etc.—it will become a pole of attraction strong enough to draw Poland itself into

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1. Among others one will see sitting there Mr. Strache, who presided over the Wenzelsbad Congress, and who will have his colleagues ratify the motion he had had voted there.

2. Like his disciple Rieger, Palacký would go so far as to advocate “a split between German Bohemia and Slavic Bohemia, if this solution were practically realizable.” (Krebs, op. cit., p. 20.)

[[PDF page 023]]

its orbit and thereby tear it from the claws of Russia...

To show it the way, Palacký—“a Slav in body and soul”—convenes in Prague, opposite the Germanic Assembly of Frankfurt, a Congress of the Slavic peoples, to which 340 delegates from seven different countries hasten (2 June). It is the first “Slavist” manifestation in history. His son-in-law Rieger—who for fifty years will be the guiding mind of Czech nationalists—sets out for his listeners the broad lines of this doctrine which, addressing peoples in the majority Catholic, is very clearly turned against the Orthodox and police Russia of Nicholas I. But if the Czech delegates are absent from Frankfurt—so that Bohemia is only partially represented there—the delegates from Russian Poland are absent from Prague, so that the representation of the Slavic countries there is only fragmentary. The work of the Congress will moreover soon be interrupted by the so-called “Pentecost” insurrection (12 June 1848). Just like the dream of a unified Germany, the plan for a great Austro-Slavic Confederation will vanish into smoke. After a short period of euphoria, the Prague Congress and the Frankfurt Parliament will both be shipwrecked, swept away by the wave of repression that will fall upon Europe.

For at the very hour when Rieger addresses his “oppressed brothers of Bohemia and Galicia” to invite them to unite, Franz Joseph succeeds Ferdinand I. Under Schwarzenberg’s influence, the young Emperor reacts quite differently from what Palacký had hoped. Instead of opposing to Tsarist ambitions a barrier of independent Slavic states, he appeals to Nicholas I to help him drown the Hungarian revolution in blood. Simultaneously, the forces of the King of Prussia intervene in Saxony, the Palatinate, Württemberg, and the Grand Duchy of Baden to put down the insurrections that have broken out there. Finally, Prince Windischgrätz is charged with restoring order in Bohemia and Hungary, a task that he carries out with scrupulous energy.

At the beginning of 1849, reaction has triumphed everywhere. The

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2. Since the insurrection of 1830, a kind of “Iron Curtain” has fallen around Poland. The Russians obviously have no desire to see Polish delegates go to a Congress whose spirit is hostile to them. The Poles, on their side, hesitate to expose themselves to reprisals by the Tsarist police, which has deported many of theirs to the penal settlements of Siberia.

[[PDF page 024]]

“mad enterprise” of 1848 ends in total fiasco. It broke for the first time the unity of Bohemia, because the delegates of the German districts went to the Parliament of Frankfurt and the delegates of the Slavic districts to the Congress of Prague. But it leaves behind not only disappointed hopes. Through the popular uprisings and the bubbling of minds, it allowed the profile of a Greater German Reich to be glimpsed, within which all lands of Germanic stock would be united. And it awakened, within the

Slavic populations, an aspiration to independence that they will no longer forget.

After nearly sinking in the turmoil, the Government of Vienna has recovered itself. It now has at its head a young sovereign who is amiable and benevolent. Franz Joseph could therefore contemplate the future with optimism. But his ministers, instead of drawing the lesson from events by undertaking a recasting of the imperial institutions, content themselves with restoring the old order, putting the recalcitrant nationalities back in line.

Scarcely have the last outbreaks of fire been extinguished when Stadion dissolves Parliament and gives the Monarchy a new Constitution, which takes no account of the linguistic claims of the peoples (1849). No doubt it contains a paragraph 5 which proclaims the equality of the Völkerstämme, that is, of the ethnic stocks which make up the Empire, and assures that all the languages in use in each Land will enjoy equal rights at school, in administration, and in the various domains of public life. But this is only a formal clause which will never be applied. A few weeks later, returning to this declaration, the Austrian cabinet decides that "if the Völkerstämme are equal, German is nevertheless placed above them," and it bases itself on this principle to Germanize completely administration, school, justice, and the army. On 31 December 1851, going one step further, the Government of Vienna replaces Stadion's Constitution with an "organic statute" in which paragraph 5 no longer appears and which proclaims German obligatory in all domains of public life.

[[PDF page 025]]

Discontented, the Slavic populations of Bohemia rise up against a state of affairs so contrary to what they had hoped. To calm them, the Government grants them permission to use the Czech language in certain formalities of private life: birth, baptism, marriage, and death certificates, etc. But even this modest concession will not be respected. On 26 February 1861, Schmerling, who has succeeded Stadion, promulgates a new Constitution. This establishes a central parliament or Reichsrat, whose members will be elected by the deputies of the provincial Diets. Under a democratic façade, this system is in fact equivalent to a reinforcement of centralization, for the deputies of the provincial Diets do not represent the people, but the ruling classes—that is to say, the Germans. Rieger, Palacký's faithful lieutenant, denounces this injustice in vehement terms.

"How is it," he exclaims from the tribune of the Reichsrat, "that the German city of Reichenberg, which has only 19,000 inhabitants, has 3 deputies, whereas Prague has only 10? How can the slightest confidence be granted to an Assembly composed in so arbitrary a fashion and corresponding in no way to the physiognomy of the populations? You wish to gag the Czechs? Woe to you the day they raise their voice and you are no longer able to reduce them to silence!"

But neither the central Government nor the bureau of Parliament takes account of his objections, so that after several weeks of useless discussions, all the Czech deputies leave the chamber in protest (June 1863).

This incident, which should have aroused considerable emotion, passes almost unnoticed, for Europe's attention is monopolized by many other problems. In Prussia, Bismarck has taken the direction of affairs into his hands, and since then relations between Berlin and Vienna have not ceased to deteriorate. Wishing to assure himself of the loyalty of the non-German populations of the Empire in anticipation of an Austro-Prussian conflict that seems inevitable to him, Franz Joseph calls Belcredi to power to practice a policy of decentralization. In 1865, the latter promulgates a law prescribing the equality of the two languages in education, the obligation for the pupils of Czech gymnasia to know

German and, reciprocally, for those of German gymnasia to learn Czech.

[[PDF page 026]]

It is then the Germans' turn to show their indignation against what they call the "forced language." They regard Czech as a backward patois, which no one understands outside the frontiers of Bohemia, and they fear that its diffusion will harm their political and cultural preponderance.

The Austro-Prussian war, which breaks out in the meantime (June 1866), comes to widen still further the gulf separating Germans and Czechs. Will it not bring about the disappearance of the Habsburg Empire? If crushed Austria were absorbed by Prussia, Czechs, Serbs, and Magyars would proclaim their independence. What then would be the fate of the Germans of Bohemia? Despite the privileged position they occupy in that country, they form there only a minority and can maintain their predominance only by relying on Vienna. Rather frightened by this not very reassuring prospect and by the awakening of the nationalities that will result from it, some of them ask Bismarck to incorporate them into Prussia and even raise a "Free Corps of the Germans of Bohemia," which they place at the disposal of General von Moltke. "During the second week of the war," writes an English observer who is in Prague at this time, "I heard the phrase: May God grant that Prussia annex us! repeated by men of the highest importance with so much bitterness and seriousness that I foresee new disasters and new convulsions arising from this strong movement of attachment to the colossus of the north. It must be noted that this strange desire comes especially from Germans of Bohemia and Moravia who have felt themselves touched by Vienna's federalist policy and who fear, not without reason, becoming the water carriers of a reborn Czech nationality."

But Bismarck by no means intends to be the gravedigger of

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1. "The establishment of bilingualism in Bohemia," they reply, "would be justified if the two populations were mixed over the entire surface of the territory. But that is not the case. Except in Prague and in a few towns of the interior, they form two distinct entities, separated by a clearly delimited linguistic frontier. Teaching German to the Czechs benefits them. Forcing us to learn Czech is only a waste of time."

[[PDF page 027]]

Austria. He simply wants to exclude it from the affairs of northern Germany. Once this result is achieved, he will inflict no additional humiliation upon it. Contrary to what one might have thought, the Austro-Hungarian Empire will continue to exist. The Germans of Bohemia will have had their fright for nothing. But their appeals to Prussia—which came close to secession—have displeased the House of Habsburg, whereas the Czechs—who had no reason to wish for an increase in German power—have shown toward the dynasty an unexpected loyalty. However ephemeral it may be, this crossing of positions is not made, either, to facilitate coexistence...

Despite the moderate conditions of the Treaty of Prague (23 August 1866), the victories won by the Prussian armies have dealt a sensitive blow to imperial prestige. The authority of the Austrian cabinet emerges diminished. Yet it is not the Czechs who will profit from this; it is the Hungarians.

Less than a year after Sadowa, they obtain from the imperial Government a solemn declaration proclaiming "the inviolable character of the lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen" and virtually

entrusting to the Magyars the task of governing all the populations of the Empire situated east of the Leitha. To this proclamation are attached a great number of political and administrative advantages. Hungary receives a particular government. Only diplomats of Hungarian origin will be accredited in Berlin as ambassadors of Austria-Hungary. Finally, Magyar is raised to the rank of official language of the Land of the Crown of Saint Stephen. From unitary, the Monarchy has become dualist.

Stimulated by this example, the Czechs immediately claim similar rights for the “lands of the Crown of Saint Wenceslas.”

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1. Like Palacký, he believes that “if Austria did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it.” (See vol. IV, p. 376.) Only, unlike Palacký—who would like Austria to free itself from German tutelage in order to place itself at the head of a Slavic Confederation—Bismarck wishes it to survive in order to ensure the penetration of Germanism into the Danubian countries.

2. To tell the truth, this provision is not expressly formulated in the “Compromise” of 1867, but this is the interpretation the Hungarians will give it and the spirit in which they will subsequently apply it.

[[PDF page 028]]

Besides the restoration of the “Liberties of Bohemia” as they existed before the suppression of the Letters of Majesty, and the official recognition of the Czech language, they express the desire to see Franz Joseph crowned in Prague, as was the custom formerly.

Extraordinary fact: Franz Joseph decides to respond favorably to this appeal. He plans to confer solemnly upon Bohemia rights analogous to those he has just granted to Hungary. What reasons push him to enter upon this path? The desire to consider the internal situation of the Empire in the face of a Germany whose power has grown still further since the victories it won over France in 1871? The advice of Hohenwart, the new head of the Austrian Government, who has taken a very clear position in favor of the nationalities? In any case, the Emperor, to whom the Diet of Prague has twice addressed new demands for autonomy, promises to satisfy it quickly. “Recalling the independent situation which was formerly that of the Crown of Saint Wenceslas,” declares the imperial rescript of 12 September 1871, “and fully conscious of the glory and power which this crown has brought to Ourselves and to Our ancestors; recalling furthermore the fidelity with which the population of the Czech Lands has constantly supported Our throne, We willingly recognize the rights of this Kingdom and are disposed to confirm this recognition in the oath We shall swear at Our coronation (Krönungseid).”

Here is a new language! The Czechs can scarcely believe it. Could their aspirations finally be realized? One would be all the more tempted to believe so because, to show clearly the importance he attaches to the imperial rescript, Franz Joseph invites the Diet of Prague to prepare a special Constitution for Bohemia.

Alas! Scarcely known, this news raises a general outcry. The Magyars will not admit at any price that the Monarchy undergo a structural change, nor that

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1. The irreducible opposition of the Magyars to any new structural modification of the Empire stems from the fact that the Hungarian state also contains several minorities within its borders—Slovaks, Ruthenians, Romanians, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes—and that it has no intention of granting them

autonomy. As fierce defenders of the status quo, Count Coloman Tisza, the “uncrowned king of Hungary” (1830-1902), and his son Stephen Tisza (1861-1918), will play a harmful role by preventing any solution of the nationalities problem.

[[PDF page 029]]

Prague can enjoy rights comparable to their own. The Polish nobility, which detests the Czechs, is jealous of the slightest favor that might be granted to them. The Germans rise up against the reconstitution of a Kingdom of Bohemia in which they would be only a minority. In short, Poles, Germans, and Hungarians submerge the Council of the Crown with a flood of requests in which they beg the Emperor not to follow through on his plan.

As if this raising of shields were not enough, Emperor William I also puts pressure on Franz Joseph to bring him to renounce “this unfortunate initiative.” Discouraged by so many obstacles raised on his road, Franz Joseph yields to the advice of his counselors. He dismisses Hohenwart, dissolves the Diet of Prague, and appoints Auersperg at the head of the imperial cabinet. At once, the partisans of integration raise their heads again and persecutions against the nationalities begin again with renewed force. All projects of autonomy concerning Bohemia are postponed sine die.

The Austrian eagle has two heads: it will never have three.

This regime of Scottish showers, far from calming minds, only exasperates racial antagonisms. How Bohemia has changed since those medieval times when the principle of nationalities did not yet exist and when German and Czech troubadours rivaled one another in poetic invention beneath the starry vaults of the Hradčany! How far away is the age when Mozart rolled by post chaise toward Prague to find glory there, when Beethoven and Stein took refuge there to escape Napoleon’s police, when Goethe walked meditatively beneath the shade trees of Carlsbad! What has become of the marvelous rose whose roots were in Vienna and whose heart blossomed on the banks of the Moldau? The songs have fallen silent in Saint Vitus Cathedral and a heavy silence has fallen over the country. In towns, as in villages, a growing malaise has insinuated itself into minds. What was only a crack at the end of the eighteenth century has become a breach that will never cease to widen.

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1. Bohemia had belonged to the Empire before Hungary. It was therefore normal that the inhabitants of the “Lands of the Crown of Saint Wenceslas” should wish to enjoy the same rights as those of the “Lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen.” But that was precisely what the Hungarians could not tolerate. To defend their point of view, they found natural allies in the Germans, since the latter also grew anxious at the rise of the Slavs. German-Hungarian friendship was founded on the principle that nothing should be changed in the Constitution of the Empire unless it were to increase the advantages already held by the Hungarians and the Germans. In these questions, Berlin always stood beside Budapest and encouraged the Hungarians in their intransigence.

[[PDF page 030]]

On either side of this invisible line of demarcation, the two communities look at one another with distrust and react in opposite ways to the fluctuations of European politics. They do so by instinct, but also by defiance.

Thus the vicissitudes of the Franco-German war of 1870 were followed in Bohemia with passionate

interest. At each French defeat, the Czechs sent Paris telegrams of condolence. At each Prussian victory, the Germans put out flags. At the announcement of the capitulation of Sedan, their enthusiasm manifested itself in processions and torchlight retreats, for they saw in it the confirmation of Germanic superiority. They will never forgive the Habsburgs for not having participated in a campaign intended to reforge the unity of the Germanic Nation. “It is here that the heart of Greater Germany beat with the greatest force!” the poet Hammerling will proclaim in an ode dedicated to his “Victorious Brothers.”

Seven years later, when Russia engages hostilities against Turkey, the Czechs go down into the street to show their joy. To the great anger of the Germans, they salute each Russian success as a victory of Slavism, as a milestone that brings them closer to the day of their liberation. During the siege of Plevna, they gather in the churches to recite prayers and have the bells rung to celebrate the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano. But when the Congress of Berlin cancels with a stroke of the pen all the conquests of Russia and obliges it to bring its armies back to their starting positions, their disappointment has no bounds. Wounded and humiliated, they retreat into themselves in a painful mutism.

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1. Where the Russian troops of General Todleben are held for six months by the Turkish troops of Osman Pasha (20 July-10 December 1877).

2. Signed on 3 March 1878, the Treaty of San Stefano consecrated Russian preponderance over Turkey and the Balkans.

[[PDF page 031]]

How could the two populations manage to understand one another? Having become in a way allergic to one another, their coexistence poses problems more and more difficult to resolve. Exposed to the jealousy of the Magyars, the hostility of the Poles, and the animosity of the Germans, the Czechs question themselves about their future within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They have a natural tendency to close ranks, and each hardening on their part brings about a parallel hardening in the opposing camp.

When in 1879 Count Taaffe succeeds Auersperg and succeeds, by prodigies of flexibility, in bringing the Czech deputies back to their seats in Parliament, it is the turn of the German deputies to leave the chamber, noisily protesting against “this undeserved capitulation.” When in 1882 the Austrian Government authorizes the foundation of a Czech University in Prague, followed shortly by the opening of two institutions of higher education and a large number of secondary schools where courses are given in the language of the country, the anger of the Germans reaches such violence that Taaffe is forced to resign.

Worse still are the difficulties encountered by his successor Badeni. Of Polish origin, he publishes in 1897 an ordinance giving the Czech language in Bohemia the same place as German. Immediately, a storm of indignation rises in the Germanic districts. At Eger, Aussig, Teplitz, and Komotau, the inhabitants gather to cries of “Death to Badeni!” and do everything in their power to bring about his fall.

These abortive attempts have hardly profited the Czechs. But they have convinced the Germans that they will end by losing the game if they do not themselves defend “their land, their language, and their right to life.” They feel themselves slowly gnawed away by the Czechs and reduced to the defensive.

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1. A striking example of the struggle led by the Czechs to dismantle the linguistic frontier is provided by what Masaryk's newspaper Čas called "the conquest of Budweis." In 1872 the Czechs founded a School Union there. Eight years later, the Germans still constituted half the population there. Around 1890, the first house on the Market Square fell into the hands of the Czechs, who greeted the taking of this bastion as a victory. In 1910, the Germans represented only a third of the city's population, and in 1921 barely one sixth. At the end of fifty years of a silent but tenacious struggle, Budweis would have become Budějovice.

[[PDF page 032]]

This is why the most extremist among them created in 1882 the National-Pan-Germanist Movement, whose direction they entrusted to Georg Ritter von Schönerer. He takes as his motto "Ein Volk, ein Reich!" advocates the attachment to Prussia of all the German populations of Austria and Bohemia, and openly begins the struggle against the Habsburgs, "incapable of defending the Germanic elements against the rising and irresistible tide of the Slavs."

In the elections of 1901, the Pan-Germanist Party wins a dazzling success in Bohemia. It obtains the majority of seats in two thirds of the German constituencies. But its decline is as rapid as its rise, and the historian would have hardly any reason to linger over it if Hitler had not frequented it in the days of his youth and if he did not tell us, in Mein Kampf, the capital role played by Schönerer in the formation of his thought.

In 1909, there also appears, in Aussig, a "German Workers' Party" of racist and socializing tendencies. It demands the radical separation of Germans and Czechs by the creation of two distinct administrative regions. On 1 December 1918, it will take the name of National Socialist German Workers' Party, thus preceding the Hitlerian Movement by eighteen months.

Faced with this rise of German extremism, Czech nationalists deem it necessary to give their struggle

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4. The "German Workers' Party," or Völkische Arbeiter Partei, was born from the fusion of a certain number of political groups, notably Franko Stein's Deutschnationaler Arbeiter Bund and Hans Knirsch's Deutschpolitische Arbeiterverein in Österreich. Its leaders will be—with Knirsch—Ferdinand Ertl, Rudolf Jung, Walter Riehl, Gottfried Fahrner, Ferdinand Seidl, Prayon, Müller, Rogelböck, and Krebs. (Cf. Hans Krebs, Kampf in Böhmen, p. 40-41.)

6. It is only on 30 April 1920 that Hitler will give the Deutsche Arbeiter Partei the name National-Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei, or N.S.D.A.P. The resemblance is too striking not to have been intended.

[[PDF page 033]]

a more radical character. Palacký died in 1876, and the young generations, whose leading figures are now called Kramář and Rašín, have on many points an outlook different from his. They no longer believe, as he did, that "Bohemia must serve as an ark between Germanic civilization and Slavic

civilization"; they no longer see in Vienna "the only center capable of bringing their people hope and peace." Since Franz Joseph's evasion, after the imperial rescript of 12 September 1871, and his refusal to restore the "historic rights" of Bohemia, they no longer have any confidence in the Austrian Government. Thus they increasingly turn their eyes away from the Hofburg to seek support elsewhere —in Saint Petersburg and in Paris.

For Paris, that is easy to understand. Was not France at the origin of the revolution of 1848? Was it not the first to proclaim the "free right of peoples to dispose of themselves"? But Saint Petersburg? That citadel of imperialism which Palacký denounced as "a source of nameless calamities"?

Yes. For Russia has evolved a great deal since the time when Nicholas I crushed the Hungarian insurrection in blood. Alexander II (1855-1881) gave his government a more liberal orientation. He abolished serfdom and corporal punishment. He reformed primary and secondary education, multiplied the universities, and began an agrarian reform by authorizing the transfer of lands to the peasants. Alexander III (1881-1894), though less liberal than his father, concluded a treaty with the French Republic intended to check Germany's power. After him, Nicholas II introduced the parliamentary system into his states by establishing the Duma. Blocked by the Japanese in the Far East, contained by the English in Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan, Russia is all the more inclined to interest itself in Europe. Turning the theses of

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1. Five years after his death, the conceptions of Czech nationalists had changed to such a point that Pekař could write: "Everything that we include in the word culture was brought to us from abroad. When we look around us, everything we see and do has been influenced by the foreigner or was given to us directly by him... All education in nationalism must consist in making us understand that the German has made us the irreducible enemy of the Germans. More still, that he himself pushed us to rival him, in order to equal his power, his privileges, and his preeminence." (The Meaning of Czech History.)

Pan-Slavism to its profit, it strives to place under its aegis all the Slavic populations of eastern and southeastern Europe. To achieve this, it relegates its expansionist aims to the background and poses as champion of all oppressed minorities. If one adds to this that after the failed revolution of 1905, a crowd of agitators taking refuge abroad announce as imminent the advent of a "democratic and fraternal" Russia, one will understand that all those who are fighting for the emancipation of the Czech people feel much less distrust toward it than the men of the generation of 1848.

Taking up Palacký's example again, but transposing it onto a new basis, Dr. Kramář convenes a second Congress of the Slavic peoples in Prague (1908). This time the success is brilliant. All the Slavic peoples hasten there, except the Poles. But the foundations of the movement are no longer the same. In place of parliamentarians and ideologues better suited to making speeches in the Diet or the Reichsrat than to practicing direct action, there have appeared the Sokols. These gymnastic associations, founded in Prague in 1862 by the Czech philosopher Tyrš and his brother-in-law J. Fügner, distinguished themselves from their creation by their Pan-Slavist character, their opposition to the Habsburgs, and their patriotic ardor. Their success was so great that the other Slavic countries were not long in imitating them. Thus similar groups appeared in 1863 at Ljubljana among the Slovenes; in 1867 at Lwów among the Poles of Galicia; in 1874 at Zagreb among the Croats; in 1882 at Belgrade among the Serbs. Their development was so rapid that in 1908 there were 800 Sokol associations in Bohemia,

totaling 75,000 members; 150 in Galicia, with 20,000 members; 162 in Posnania, with 6,000 members;

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1. Favorable to Pan-Slavism in the anti-Russian form in which Palacký had conceived it, the Poles had cooled considerably since this movement placed itself under the aegis of Saint Petersburg. For the Czechs, exposed to the encroachments of Germanism, Russian-directed Pan-Slavism represented a guarantee for their national existence. For the Poles, subjected to the tutelage of the Tsars, it took on the aspect of treason. (Cf. Boris Celovsky, Das Münchener Abkommen, p. 73.) This difference in outlook would be the beginning of a Polish-Czech antagonism that would continue to grow.

2. Sokol in Czech means “falcon” and, by extension, “hero.”

3. Fügner, a German of Bohemia married to a Czech woman, was manifestly inspired by the Turnerschaften organized in Prussia by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn under the Napoleonic occupation, with a view to furnishing cadres for the future armies of Liberation.

[[PDF page 035]]

32 in Slovenia, with 2,500 members; and 50 in Croatia, with 6,500 members. These sporting associations serve not only as a link between their respective countries. They make trips abroad, during which they engage in intense propaganda in favor of their compatriots. Finally, through their permanent contact with student youth, they give the movements of national emancipation a revolutionary impulse unknown until then.

On 20 July 1912, the day when the Sokols hold their first great Pan-Slavic Congress, the inhabitants of Prague discover with surprise the scale this organization has taken on. A tribune, decorated in the Czech colors blue-white-red (and not in the black and gold colors of the Austrian flag), has been erected at the very spot where twenty-seven members of the Czech nobility were beheaded after the battle of the White Mountain. The guests of honor, among whom are representatives of France and Russia, take their places there beside local notables. 17,000 Sokols from Bohemia, Russia, Ukraine, Slovenia, Croatia, and Lusatia, as well as delegations from overseas and notably from the United States, file past them in such impeccable order that the Russian General Karavaev cannot help exclaiming:

“This is an army that lacks only cannons!”

The day, placed under the sign of Czecho-Franco-Russian friendship, ends with the inauguration of a monument to Palacký, during which several speakers pronounce vehement speeches against Austria and Germany and call for “the now near times when all the Slavic peoples of Europe will recover their liberty.”

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2. In 1871, a delegation of Sokols went to Nancy, where its visit caused a sensation. Coming after the defeat, its visit laid the first foundations of Czech-French friendship, which would soon find one of its most ardent defenders in the person of Professor Ernest Denis.

3. Where there is a numerous colony of Czech immigrants, notably in Chicago. By contrast, the Hungarians forbade the Slovaks from taking part in the festival and the Poles refrained from appearing there because of the Polish-Czech tension reigning in the former County of Teschen.

[[PDF page 036]]

Needless to say, the Government of Vienna observes the rise of the Sokols with much less enthusiasm than General Karavaev. It has complacently closed its eyes to the Congress of Prague so as not to provoke incidents that would have had unfortunate repercussions beyond the frontiers. But it bitterly repents having allowed a Czech University to open in Prague. The Faculty of Sciences in particular—where a chair of history and sociology has been entrusted to Professor Masaryk—has become a kind of revolutionary club where all the progressive youth of the country meets. If the imperial cabinet believed that these concessions would bring détente, it was seriously mistaken. Coming too late, they were interpreted by the Czechs as an admission of weakness. The Czechs concluded from this that only violence paid. Hardly a day passes without collisions, sometimes bloody, between students of the two communities, the wrecking of German shops, and excesses of every kind. Sabotage and attacks multiply in so disturbing a manner during the second half of 1912 that in 1913 the Austrian cabinet finds itself forced to dissolve the Diet and entrust the administration of Bohemia to a Commission presided over by the Statthalter.

The country thus finds itself placed under tutelage, or more exactly “under judicial council.”

This time the “Young Czechs” speak of running to arms and unleashing an insurrection. It takes all the authority of Kramář and the coolness of Masaryk to bring them back to reason and prevent them from giving the Germans a pretext to engage in massive reprisals. But the situation nevertheless remains extremely tense. A single spark would be enough to set the powder alight.

This spark will spring forth. But not in Prague: in Bosnia.

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4. This Slavic province, occupied by the Turks until 1878, was annexed to Austria in 1908.

[[PDF page 037]]

On 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, presumptive heir to the throne, and his morganatic wife, Sophie Chotek, Duchess of Hohenberg, make their solemn entry into Sarajevo. The date, very badly chosen, has the look of a provocation, for 28 June is the anniversary of the battle of Kosovo, which represents for the Serbs a national humiliation comparable to the battle of the White Mountain for the Czechs.

On the archduke’s route, four young activists belonging to the patriotic organization Mlada Bosna (Young Bosnia) are waiting to assassinate him. All have sacrificed their lives in advance. At the moment when the procession slows down to enter a curve, a fifth conspirator named Gavrilo Princip jumps onto the running board of the lead car, fires his revolver point blank at its occupants, and shoots down Franz Ferdinand as well as his wife.

This crime is all the more absurd because the Duchess of Hohenberg belonged to the lesser Czech nobility; because the heir archduke, far from being hostile to the Slavs, showed them warm sympathy; because he wanted to rally them to the Habsburg crown and was waiting only for his accession to the throne to put an end to the dualist Constitution of 1867 and substitute for it a federal regime more in conformity with the ethnic complexity of the Empire.

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2. On 28 June 1389, the Serbs, crushed by the Ottomans on the plain of Kosovo, lost their independence and recovered it only in 1878.

3. A branch of a Serbian organization called sometimes “Unity or Death,” sometimes “the Black Hand,” Mlada Bosna is a secret association founded in 1911, whose object is to unite to the kingdom of Serbia the Slavs living in the south of Austria-Hungary and those of Macedonia. It is composed chiefly of active officers and members of the Sokols; it has access to Serbian arsenals, from which it draws all the matériel it needs; it receives the funds necessary for its activity directly from army coffers; finally, it is placed under the immediate command of the chief of the Counter-Espionage Service of the Serbian General Staff, Colonel Dimitrijević. It was Dimitrijević who personally decided and organized the Sarajevo attack. His subordinate, Major Tankosić, likewise a career officer, was charged with recruiting the executants, supplying them with arms and the necessary funds, and providing them with the route that enabled them to travel into Austro-Hungarian territory without attracting the attention of the authorities responsible for protecting the archduke and his wife. (Cf. Michel Dacier, “Un problème qui reste obscur: les origines de la guerre de 1914,” Écrits de Paris, October 1964, p. 5 and 6.)

5. This is what the supporters of Pan-Slavism, whose policy aimed at the creation of independent and homogeneous states, wanted at no price. Despite his young age (19 years), Princip did not ignore it, since during his interrogation he would declare: “As sovereign, he [Franz Ferdinand] would have realized certain ideas and certain reforms which would have blocked our road.”

[[PDF page 038]]

But this attack, born of an Austro-Serbian tension provoked at once by Austria’s blindness and by a campaign of agitation encouraged by Russia, will have consequences much broader than its author can foresee. For Princip, it means that the era of half-measures is closed and that the minorities will recoil before nothing in order to conquer their liberty. For the world, it throws the door wide open to violence.

On 23 July, Austria addresses an ultimatum to Serbia. On the 28th, it declares war on it. The next day, learning that the Austrians have bombarded Belgrade, Russia announces that it has mobilized the twelve army corps facing Galicia. In reality, this mobilization had begun twelve days earlier. Then a whirlwind of madness seems to fall upon the continent. In the night of 31 July to 1 August, William II launches two ultimatums: one to Russia, giving it twelve hours to halt its mobilization; the other to France, ordering it to remain neutral in the event of a German-Russian conflict.

On 1 August, at 3:45 p.m., France decrees general mobilization. At 7 p.m., Germany declares war on Russia. On the 3rd, Mr. von Schoen, William II’s ambassador in Paris, hands Mr. Bienvenu-Martin—who is replacing Mr. Viviani ad interim—Germany’s declaration of war. On the 4th, at 8:02 a.m., the first German soldiers cross the frontier of Belgium. King Albert I immediately denounces

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1. “What King Peter said to General de Sancy represents the thought of the entire Serbian people,” declares Mr. Descos, French minister in Belgrade, in a dispatch to the Quai d’Orsay dated 26 November 1912. “The Balkan war necessarily entails as consequence an Austrian cataclysm, and the only alternative is to know whether it is suitable to unleash it at the present hour or to restrain it for a few more years... It goes without saying that, without the excitations coming from Russia, Austro-Serbian tension would never have reached its present state. The Serbs are certain that in the event of conflict, all Russia will rise against Austria to defend Serbia, the pivot of the beginning struggle

between Germanism and Slavism."

2. In Budapest, the Hungarians welcome the death of Franz Ferdinand "as the end of a nightmare." (Polzer-Hoditz, L'Empereur Charles, p. 64-65.) In Berlin, satisfaction is not hidden. In Saint Petersburg, they exult. But it is perhaps in Bohemia that the reaction is most lively. The Germans give cries of joy. At Brünn, where the Sokols are holding their annual meeting that day, the Czechs form processions and spread through the city while frenetically acclaiming the name of the murderer. (Hans Krebs, Kampf in Böhmen, p. 46.)

[[PDF page 039]]

this aggression and appeals for "common military action." The same day, at midnight, Great Britain declares war on Germany. "That evening," writes Lloyd George, "I seemed to myself a man living on a planet suddenly torn from its orbit and hurled madly toward the unknown."

On 6 August, the troops of Nicholas II having crossed the frontiers of Galicia, Austria in turn declares war on Russia. At the end of a chain reaction that has escaped the control of governments, France, England, and Russia find themselves at war with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Six weeks after the Sarajevo attack, Europe is on fire.

[[PDF page 040]]

II
THE ODYSSEY OF THE CZECH LEGIONARIES ACROSS SIBERIA (1914-1919)

The outbreak of hostilities places Czech nationalists before an agonizing dilemma. Militarily, Bohemia is in the camp of Germany and Austria. Morally, its sympathies go to Russia, France, and the United States. What must those who wish to lead it to independence do? Fight beside the Habsburgs, whom they execrate, or take sides with the Allies? Before pronouncing themselves, they would have to know who will win the war. In 1914, it is still too early to say. Whatever their preferences, the Czech leaders must take realities into account.

Now these realities are harsh. As in all belligerent countries, martial law has been proclaimed. All men from 20 to 45 years of age have been mobilized. The youngest and most dynamic elements of the nation have been sent to the Russian front. From the political point of view, Prague resembles a desert.

On 3 August 1914, Grand Duke Nicholas, commander-in-chief of the Tsarist armies, published a manifesto inviting all the Slavic populations of the Dual Monarchy to rise against their oppressors. But this appeal was

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1. America is still neutral. But the Czech colony in the United States is numerous and prosperous. It has contributed powerfully to the financing of the Sokols, and its relations with its country of origin have remained very lively.

2. At this period, the balance seems rather to lean in favor of the Central Empires.

4. One hundred years earlier (March 1813), Kutuzov had launched a similar appeal “to all the Germanic populations,” inviting them to shake off Napoleon’s yoke and threatening the princes with the loss of their domains if they did not join the insurrection.

[[PDF page 041]]

followed nowhere. In Bohemia in particular, the masses remained loyal. The activists of the opposition have neither arms, nor financial means, nor a generally recognized leader. What remains of the political parties is not ready for the event.

Moreover, the spokesmen of Czech nationalism are divided. All want the war to modify the situation, but their opinions differ as to the means of reaching that point. Some believe it necessary to profit from the difficulties that hostilities will inevitably bring Austria in order to compel it to recognize the “historic rights” of Bohemia and wrest from it the status of an autonomous state, without for all that breaking the framework of the Monarchy. Others, more radical, see in Austria-Hungary a worm-eaten edifice that the war will not fail to throw down, and whose ruin must consequently be hastened. These latter are convinced that the Czechs will truly enjoy their independence only in a state freed from any bond with the Monarchy. They base their conviction on the anti-Austrian reactions of the Czech colonies abroad and on the little eagerness shown by their compatriots to fight under the black and gold flag of the Habsburgs.

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3. “Except for rare exceptions, Czech policy counted on the existence of the Habsburg Empire and showed itself ready to conclude a durable compromise with it, in the hope of seeing the Czechoslovak nation assume within it a position capable of allowing it to exercise a decisive action over its destinies.” (Papoušek, op. cit., p. 7.)

4. In the first rank of whom are Thomas Masaryk, professor at the University of Prague and president of the Czech progressive group in the Reichsrat of Vienna, Edvard Beneš, Šámal, Dürich, and Sychrava.

5. “Opposition to Austria had to become an effective opposition, opposition in earnest, opposition unto death.” (Masaryk, op. cit., p. 5.)

6. As early as 27 July, the Czechs of Paris tore down the flag of the Austrian embassy. The same day, the Czechs of Chicago marched to cries of “Down with the Habsburgs!” On 3 August, the Czechs of London held a meeting in Hyde Park, where they demanded the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary. But though the reaction was the same, these different groups had very different conceptions regarding the future of their nation. The French and American colonies wanted a democratic and parliamentary Republic. The English colony wanted a constitutional Monarchy whose head would be a prince from one of the Entente countries. The Russian colony aspired to the restoration of the kingdom of Bohemia under the aegis of a Romanov.

7. “Our Czech soldiers, when leaving Prague, manifested their anti-Austrian sentiments; the news received from the army announced refusals of obedience and even rebellions. Soon one heard talk of rigorous measures taken by the military authority, even of executions.” (Masaryk, op. cit., p. 4.)

[[PDF page 042]]

But Vienna, where power has passed into the hands of the military, does not intend to tolerate any seditious movement. From the first days of the war, Klofáč, the leader of the Czech Socialist Party, is arrested. Shortly afterward, Scheiner, the head of the Sokols, Rašín, and Kramář meet the same fate. The police carry out mass arrests. The provisions of martial law are reinforced. Finally, all opposition newspapers are banned. These measures, which reduce the Czech nationalists to silence, deal a serious blow to internal resistance.

Determined to continue their activity at any cost, Masaryk and Beneš try to give it a clandestine character. They found a secret organization—the Maffia—whose role will consist in feeding an intelligence service and making contacts abroad. But whether this task has yielded only disappointing results, or whether he has judged that he would accomplish more useful work beyond the frontiers, Masaryk leaves for Italy on 17 December 1914, leaving Beneš the task of continuing the internal work.

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2. Brought before the courts, Kramář will be sentenced to death in 1916. But Franz Joseph will suspend his execution. He prefers to keep him as a hostage in order to be able to exert pressure on the population.

3. Notably Masaryk's Naše Doba (Our Time) and Čas (The Age), České Slovo (The Czech Word), and Samostatnost (Independence).

4. In addition, the retreat of Grand Duke Nicholas's armies, which had invaded Galicia in September 1914 and which the Czechs were preparing to welcome as liberators, caused a great wave of discouragement to pass over Bohemia.

5. "Our struggle was no less important than that of the Fighters of God," Masaryk would later declare in an article in which he identified the combat of the Czech patriots of 1914-1915 with that of the Hussite warriors of Jan Žižka's time. (See above, p. 12, n. 1.)

6. With Seton Watson and Wickham Steed, political editor of The Times in London; with Professor Ernest Denis in Paris; with Mr. Stepina, leader of the Czecho-Slav Committee (Československý Pomocný Výbor) in Chicago.

8. "This determination was not easy to take," Masaryk writes. "The resolution in question there was definitive; I knew it and I felt it, but it was clear to me that at this great moment we could not remain passive... Since it was impossible for us to rise against Austria within, it was abroad that we had to do so. The principal task would be to win sympathies there for our people and for its national program, to enter into relations with Allied political men and governments, to organize the unity of tactics of all our colonies, and above all to organize an army with the prisoners originating from among us." (The Resurrection of a State, p. 37.)

[[PDF page 043]]

Unfortunately, Beneš is too well known to the police not to be subjected to severe surveillance. Obliged to change residence constantly, warned by friends that he is on the verge of being arrested, he hands over the direction of the Maffia to his deputy Šámal and crosses the Bavarian frontier under a false identity (1 September 1915). The next day he arrives in Switzerland, where he resumes contact with Masaryk. A fortnight later (17 September) the two men settle in London and Paris, where they found a "National Committee of the Czech Provinces," in agreement with Deputy Dürich and a young Slovak

scholar named Milan Štefánik.

Because the internal resistance has been beheaded in Prague, Masaryk, Beneš, and Štefánik become the sole spokesmen of the Czechs and Slovaks in the Allied camp. Yet the welcome they find in Paris is far from being as warm as they had hoped.

The majority of Frenchmen are totally ignorant of the problems of central Europe. The Czechs are much less

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2. He too had succeeded in crossing the frontier in May 1915.

3. Born in 1880 near Myjava, in Slovakia, Milan Rastislav Štefánik studied at the University of Prague, where he received a doctorate of philosophy in 1904. Having come to Paris around 1906, he was appointed assistant at the Observatory of Meudon, on behalf of which he undertook numerous scientific missions in Africa, America, and Oceania. Naturalized French and mobilized in the infantry from the first days of the war, he was promoted lieutenant in 1915. His adherence to the “National Council” will have great importance: first, because he will serve as a link between Czechs and Slovaks; second, because his status as a French officer will facilitate his relations with the military circles of the Entente.

4. As a result of the imprisonment of Kramář, Klofáč, and Rašín.

5. Masaryk becomes President of the Committee; Dürich, Vice President; Beneš, Secretary General. Štefánik will be charged with military questions.

6. Beneš complains bitterly of this. “Our political position in Paris was precarious,” Masaryk writes on his side. “The French themselves knew little about us, almost only what we had been able to tell them, and our means were weak. The Parliament of Vienna was not sitting and, consequently, not a single Czech voice was heard... The Austrian, Hungarian, and German newspapers kept silent about our action. In Le Temps of Paris, one could even see a little note not favorable to our cause.” (Op. cit., p. 82.)

7. “I imagined that the ground in Paris had been better prepared before the war by Prague than it was in reality,” Masaryk writes. (Op. cit., p. 47.)

[[PDF page 044]]

known than the Poles or the Serbs and, in 1915, the French Government hesitates to include the dismemberment of Austria among its war aims. Thus it is not on the banks of the Seine that the Czech independence movement will take flight. It is behind the Russian front, in Ukraine and Volhynia, that there will begin what still appears to us today—despite all the events that have occurred in the interval—as one of the most extraordinary expeditions of this century.

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Why in Russia rather than elsewhere? First, because the Czech colonies of Kiev, Moscow, and Petrograd are much more numerous than those of London or Paris. Next, because Bohemia is not unknown to the Tsarist leaders: they even have very precise ideas concerning its future. Finally, because the Austrian regiments into which Czech soldiers were mobilized were almost all sent to the

eastern front.

Now, as early as August 1914, a certain number of Czech soldiers cross the firing line and present themselves at the Russian outposts brandishing their Sokol membership cards. The mere sight of these papers ensures them a friendly reception, for they amount to a certificate of Slavism and Austrophobia.

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1. “At the beginning of the war,” writes Jaroslav Papoušek, “France was not interested in the destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.” (Op. cit., p. 20.) It had not renounced the hope of signing a separate peace with Austria, an eventuality that filled Beneš and Masaryk with fear. “Among the Allies,” the latter writes, “responsibility was imputed a little too exclusively to Germany. Austria was not seen in the same light, for one was not fighting directly against her. But a large share of responsibility belonged to her.” (The Resurrection of a State, p. 73.)

2. On 15 September 1914, receiving Messrs. Buchanan and Paléologue, ambassadors of Great Britain and France in Petrograd, Mr. Sazonov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, declares to them that Austria-Hungary, after the war, must constitute “a triple monarchy, composed of the Austrian Empire, the Kingdom of Bohemia, and the Kingdom of Hungary.” The same day, addressing a deputation of Czechs and Slovaks, he affirms to them “that the restoration of the Kingdom of Bohemia corresponds to the designs of the Russian Government.” Finally, on 17 September, receiving the same delegation, the Tsar promises it that the wishes of the Czechs will be realized “by the restoration of the Kingdom of Bohemia under a member of the Romanov family.”

3. There are very few of them on the Serbian front, and not a single one on the western front.

[[PDF page 045]]

Favorably impressed by this influx of deserters—which the Tsarist authorities attribute to Grand Duke Nicholas’s manifesto—the government of Petrograd authorizes the creation of a battalion of Czech volunteers under the name Družina (20 August 1914). Yet the 800 men who compose it are not recruited among the deserters of the Austrian army. Only Czechs already established for some time in Volhynia, or whom the declaration of war surprised on Russian territory, have the right to be part of it.

During the last months of 1914, and especially from March 1915 onward, desertions multiply. Entire companies and battalions of the 11th, 28th, 36th, 42nd, 81st, and 91st Austrian infantry regiments pass to the Russian side with arms and baggage. On 3 April, the 28th Infantry Regiment of Prague does the same at the Dukla Pass. The retreat of the Tsarist armies during the summer of 1915 further increases the number of Czech prisoners. Soon more than 25,000 of them find themselves penned behind Russian barbed wire.

Meanwhile (7 March 1915), members of the Czech colonies of Petrograd and Moscow have grouped together to found the “Union of Czechs and Slovaks of Russia.” The leaders of this organization immediately undertake démarches with the Government of Petrograd to obtain the creation of an autonomous Czech army that will fight beside the Russians against the Central Empires. Why not constitute it by freeing prisoners of war and incorporating them into the Družina? Sazonov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, appears rather favorable to a formula

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2. On 14 September 1914, the French Government granted Czechs residing in France the right to enlist

in the Foreign Legion and to constitute there a special company. This company would distinguish itself in 1915 in the combats of La Targette and Neuville-Saint-Waast. But the Czech colony in France is small. Unlike what happens in Russia, no Czech prisoners are taken on the western front, so that this company, far from being able to develop, is condemned to disappear for lack of being able to renew its manpower.

3. In the Carpathians. This defection creates so wide a breach in the Austrian disposition that if the Russian Command had known how to profit from it, it could have penetrated to the heart of Hungary.

4. The creation of the "Union of Czechs of Russia" thus precedes by eight months the creation of the National Committee of Paris (14 November 1915). One has the right to ask whether it was not the fear of being beaten to it by the Russians that incited Masaryk and Beneš to hasten their departure from Prague.

[[PDF page 046]]

of this kind. But the Russian Great General Staff is much more reticent. It has no confidence in the Czech deserters and readily repeats that "he who has betrayed once will always betray." The Tsar has to intervene in person to force the decision. On 13 January 1916, the Družina is transformed into a regiment of Chasseurs. A few weeks later, the influx of volunteers is such that the regiment becomes a brigade. But the Russian General Staff places severe conditions on its development. All higher cadres, most of the lower cadres, and the language of command will remain Russian. The Czech volunteers will be kept away from the neuralgic sectors of the front. They will receive only light armament and will be employed only on reconnaissance missions.

Faced with these restrictions, which betray an obvious ill will, the leaders of the Union of Czechs return to the charge. They launch a press campaign in favor of the constitution of a "true Czech army distinct from the Tsarist army." This time their efforts seem destined to be crowned with success, for on 21 April 1916 the Tsar consents to the release of "Slavic prisoners," for whom the Czech and Slovak organizations of Russia will stand guarantor. Two months later, in view of a favorable report from the Minister of War, Chuvayev, he pronounces in favor of the creation of a Czech and Slovak army.

But none of these promises will be kept.

First through the fault of the Union of Czechs itself, whose demands displease the members of the imperial cabinet. Then, for reasons of internal policy.

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2. It is in the course of one of these successful reconnaissances that Lieutenant Sirový, who commands a Czech detachment, draws attention to himself by his bravery.

3. Not content with having obtained authorization to form a "distinct" Czechoslovak army, the Union of Czechs now asks for the financial means necessary to maintain it and for a public declaration by the Russian Government promising to grant independence to the future Czech state.

4. The Russian Government categorically rejects these demands, emphasizing that they are contrary "not only to international law, but also to Russia's war aims." Simultaneously, Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna (born Alix of Hesse), whose influence continues to grow in court circles, exerts very strong pressure on her husband to bring him to reverse his decision. "You are wrong to trust the Czechs," she

tells him. “These people have already betrayed their Emperor. They will betray you too and will end by bringing us the revolution.” It goes without saying that these remarks, reported to the Czechs, provoke their anger. They immediately launch a violent campaign against the Tsarina, whom they accuse of betraying Russia for the benefit of the Germans.

[[PDF page 047]]

Since February 1916, Stürmer has succeeded Goremykin as President of the Council. In July, he also replaces Sazonov at Foreign Affairs. The new government adopts a political line very different from that of its predecessor. It considers with growing anxiety the activity of the Czech National Committee of Paris. Masaryk in particular inspires no confidence in it. It knows his revolutionary tendencies, his “Westernism,” and his will to make the new Czech state a democratic republic on the French or American model. Now, as far as Stürmer is concerned, he has by no means renounced giving the Czech problem a “Slavic solution” that will make Bohemia a satellite of Russia. Thus he exerts growing pressure on the Union of Petrograd to oblige it to break relations with the Committee of Paris.

These fears lead the Tsarist General Staff to practice a true policy of obstruction toward the Czechs. During the summer of 1916, the recruitment of volunteers is suspended on the pretext that the departure of prisoners—most of whom have been transformed into agricultural workers—would compromise the harvest. Then the Czech brigade is split in two. One half is incorporated into a “Ukrainian Replacement Corps” stationed in Kiev; the other into a “Serbian Legion” being formed behind the Romanian front. Finally, the Union of Czechs and Slovaks of Russia is “invited” to transform itself into a “National Council,” which will receive its directives only from the government of Saint Petersburg.

Beneš and Masaryk are dismayed by this. Is the unity of Czechs abroad going to be broken? The National Committee of Paris immediately imagines a countermeasure. Since Russia does not know what to do with the thousands of Czech deserters who have taken refuge there,

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1. This is the period when Rasputin’s influence becomes considerable. “From that Russia,” writes Masaryk, “neither the Allies could expect help, nor we ourselves political support.” (Op. cit., p. 153.)

2. “I was too socialist for my adversaries,” Masaryk would later write, “and I was not ignorant of the joke circulating in the Czech circles of Paris, according to which the day the Russians entered Prague, the first man hanged would be me.” And he adds: “Of all the decisions I have taken, the one for which I congratulated myself most was refusing to play the entire future of my country on the Russian card alone.”

3. He also fears that the new national states to be created in the event of Allied victory will become docile instruments in the hands of the West, and that France, England, and America, pushed by Masaryk, will use them to check Russian expansionism in eastern Europe and in the Balkans.

[[PDF page 048]]

let it send them to France! The French Government will take charge of them. It will equip them, arm them, and direct them to the western front, where they will contribute to the final victory.

To bring the Tsarist authorities to accept this plan, Masaryk dispatches Dürich and Štefánik to Petrograd (August 1916). But Russian governmental circles receive their proposal with such coldness

that the National Council deems it more prudent to adjourn the negotiations. Štefánik, who has been promoted to commandant for several weeks, does the impossible to avoid a rupture. He multiplies contacts on the margins of the conference and appears on the point of succeeding, when Dürich ranges himself with the Russian point of view. He accepts that the problem of Bohemia receive a “Slavic solution” and openly takes position against Masaryk’s theses. At once the National Committee of Paris renounces its project. Too late! The split is consummated between the two National Councils. The Czechs will henceforth have a double representation abroad: one, monarchist, in Petrograd; the other, republican, in Paris.

Nothing remains for Štefánik but to take the road back. Passing through Romania, he stops a few days at Jassy, just long enough to conclude with the Romanian Government an agreement under the terms of which three hundred Czech émigrés will return to France, where they will serve to fill out again the company of the Foreign Legion, decimated by the battles of 1915-1916. This will be the only positive result of this unfortunate mission.

For two and a half years the Czechs have been working at the dislocation of Austria. But it will be Russia that collapses first.

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1. In the course of July, the French Government consented to the creation of an autonomous Czechoslovak army in France. It charged Štefánik with establishing the modalities, in agreement with General Janin, recently detached by the French High Command to Russian General Headquarters.

2. Masaryk avoided going himself to Russia, knowing that he is not persona grata there and not wishing to risk, by his presence, provoking a dispute that would have repercussions on inter-Allied relations.

3. “Deputy Dürich... had good manners, spoke French and Russian, but politically he was not up to the circumstances. He stood for Tsarism, and especially for Orthodoxy, like many of our Russophiles who expected their salvation from Russia.” (Masaryk, op. cit., p. 58.)

[[PDF page 049]]

1917 arrives. Strikes, acts of sabotage and insubordination, occupations of barracks and public buildings, wrecking of police stations multiply throughout the territory. Fearing a collapse of the eastern front, the representatives of the Entente exert increased pressure on the Tsarist General Staff. They entreat it to revive energies, to make arrows from every wood, finally to authorize the enlistment of Czech prisoners. Under their insistence, General Gurko addresses the following message to Commandant Štefánik:

17 January 1917

You are requested to constitute a Committee composed of a small number of Czech personalities. Its role will consist in recruiting, if need arises, volunteers among our prisoners of war; forming with them Czech and Slovak military units; and organizing teams of workers in factories working for national defense.

It will be one of the last gestures of the agonizing regime, for within six weeks it will be swept away. On 27 February (12 March), a general insurrection breaks out in Petrograd. In the night of the 27th to the 28th, Nicholas II is dethroned. A government composed of members of the Constitutional

Democratic Party and Socialist Revolutionaries is formed under the presidency of Prince Lvov. Guchkov becomes Minister of War; Kerensky, Minister of Justice; Miliukov, Minister of Foreign Affairs. One of its first concerns, on coming to power, is to declare that Russia renounces any claim over Bohemia and that the new government "is favorable to the creation of an independent Czechoslovak state" (24 March). A few days later, the entire imperial family is placed under arrest and interned at the palace of Tsarskoye Selo (2 April).

Then events accelerate. Men, landscapes, and situations change from one day to the next, carried away by a whirlwind of iron, fire, and blood.

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2. Whose initials are in Russian K.D., hence the name "Cadets" by which they will subsequently be designated.

3. Since May 1916, Miliukov, Masaryk, and Beneš had agreed on the policy to follow toward Austria. (Cf. Masaryk, The Resurrection of a State, p. 127.)

[[PDF page 050]]

The collapse of Tsarism and the advent of the Lvov-Kerensky-Miliukov government fulfill the wishes of the Czech Committee of Paris. Henceforth there will no longer be any question of a "Slavic solution" for Bohemia. Now that Nicholas II and his dynasty have fallen, who would think of placing the crown of Saint Wenceslas on the head of a Romanov? Consequently, the Union of Czechs of Russia eliminates monarchists and conservatives from its midst in order to replace them with more progressive elements. This transformation will facilitate the rapprochement between the two organizations of Petrograd and Paris. Finally, the victory of democracy in Russia brings decisive support to Masaryk's theses. He has always maintained that Czechoslovakia must be a democratic republic. The eviction of his rivals ensures the triumph of his tendency.

Not only does the first Russian revolution increase the weight of democracy in the world, but the collapse of the Romanovs seems to prefigure that of the Habsburgs. Thus Masaryk hastens to address telegrams of congratulation to the members of the new government, several of whom, moreover, are his personal friends.

Nothing now stands in the way of the enlistment of Czech prisoners in combat units. On 6 April 1917, at Miliukov's urging, the Provisional Government approves the "Rules for the Organization of a Czechoslovak Army in Russia." Escaping from their barbed wire or their agricultural labor detachments, volunteers flock to the recruiting centers. On 26 June, their number rises to 15,000, which enables General Dukhonin to transform the Czech brigade into a division.

But this cascade of events has not stopped military operations. Taking advantage of the disorder reigning behind the Russian front,

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1. "Personally," Masaryk writes, "I had had with official Russia only unpleasant relations. I had long been on the index. On the other hand, I had friends in all the progressive parties." (The Resurrection of a State, p. 146.)

2. Masaryk sees democracy not only as the culmination of all Czech history since Jan Hus, but as "the

political form of Humanity." (Op. cit., p. 488.)

[[PDF page 051]]

the Austro-German armies have resumed the offensive. They advance all along a line running from the Gulf of Finland to the Black Sea. Kerensky and General Kornilov—the new commander-in-chief—had hoped that the Tsar's eviction and the establishment of a more liberal government would galvanize the nation and produce in it a great patriotic surge. The chiefs of the Allied missions entreat him to intensify the war, to proclaim the levée en masse, to constitute himself as a "Committee of Public Safety." But the euphoria of March quickly subsided. The rumble of discontented troops demanding "peace, bread, and land" begins to cover the voice of the Provisional Government.

To give courage back to the population by showing it that he is ready to resort to the most energetic solutions, the Russian Great General Staff decides to throw into the furnace all the troops that remain to it, including the Czech division. This is engaged in the sector of Zborov. The battle that begins in the second half of June 1917 is one of the most violent known on the eastern front. For three days, the Austro-German positions are pounded by Russian artillery. On 18 June (2 July), the Czech formations rush to the assault. They fight with frenzy, for each of the men composing them knows he will be shot if taken prisoner. To begin with, all their attacks are crowned with success. The advanced elements of the 35th and 70th Infantry Regiments fall back in disorder. The Czechs already see themselves making their victorious entry into Prague. Kerensky is so satisfied with this success that he himself comes to the front to congratulate the troops. He decides to create a special medal to commemorate this victory and declares that all the regiments that took part in it will have the right to call themselves "Regiments of 18 June."

But after the first moment of surprise, the Austro-Hungarians recover themselves. Only their outposts have been dented. Much more battle-hardened than the Czech transfuges,

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1. In the north, General Hoffmann's troops march on Reval. In the center, Marshal von Eichhorn's armies approach Minsk. In the south, the Austrian divisions of General Arz advance between the Dniester and the Bug.

[[PDF page 052]]

who have scarcely fought since the beginning of hostilities, they resume the offensive and are not long in throwing them back onto their starting positions. Demoralized by this setback and by the inadequacy of supplies, certain Russian regiments break up or lay down their arms. No longer feeling supported, the Czech battalions in turn lose their footing. Around 25 June (9 July), the battle of Zborov turns into a disaster. Fearing encirclement, the Czechs fall back hurriedly on Tarnopol. No doubt they have done their best to break the enemy lines. But Russian officers will retain the impression that their premature disengagement compromised the whole affair. "Without the defection of the Czechs," they say to themselves, "we would have thrown the Austrians back beyond Lemberg!"

Arriving at Kiev, the Czech units regroup. During their retreat across the Ukrainian plain they have seen many of their compatriots flock to them, in whose eyes they appear as places of refuge, alone capable of protecting them against the growing disorder. The volume of enlistments is so considerable that on 17 July General Brusilov authorizes the creation of a second division. During the following weeks, the influx of volunteers increases still further, so that a third division comes to join the two

preceding ones. Finally, on 9 October, General Dukhonin announces that the Czech forces in Russia constitute an independent Army Corps of 42,000 men.

The formation of the Czech army therefore seems well under way when Russia undergoes a new series of shocks.

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Disgusted by the weakness of the Government and by the anarchy that reigns in the rear of the army, Kornilov gathers around him a few elite regiments and marches

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1. The number of desertions is so high that General Kornilov has to reestablish the death penalty to punish them. (It had been abolished by the revolutionary government.)

2. Though the Czechs are incorporated into the Tsarist army, for the Austro-Germans they are francs-tireurs whom the laws of war permit to be shot without trial.

4. Where thousands of Czech prisoners are occupied in bringing in the wheat.

[[PDF page 053]]

on Petrograd with the intention of establishing a military dictatorship there. Kerensky reacts by constituting a Directorate of five members, composed of Cadets and moderate Socialists. He succeeds in blocking Kornilov's attempt on the spot and deprives him of his command. But in doing so, he has broken the back of the army and cleared the way for his worst enemies: the Bolsheviks, who have everywhere constituted "Soviets of workers and soldiers" within which their partisans hold the majority. A few days later (end of October 1917), the second revolution breaks out. The Soviet of Petrograd takes control of the capital and brings Lenin and Trotsky to power. Kerensky is swept away. Bourgeois and moderate Socialists leave the capital in all haste and try to regroup in the region of Samara.

What will become of the Czechs? Deprived overnight of the support of the parties that had sustained them until then, they suddenly feel as though suspended in a void. Must they take position against the Bolsheviks or collaborate with them? The Union of Czechs of Russia gives them no counsel, for the colony of Petrograd is in disagreement with that of Kiev. The first is rather progressive; the second, conservative. This results in a situation so confused that when the Red forces, very superior in number, enter Ukraine under Muraviev's direction, the Czechs have no other choice than to sign with them an agreement guaranteeing their repatriation in exchange for their neutrality. But elsewhere, they help Antonov-Ovseyenko fight against the Whites by spontaneously handing over

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1. "One quickly recognized behind him," writes John Reed, "the iron-gloved fist of the bourgeoisie, ready to fall upon the revolution." (Ten Days That Shook the World, p. 11.)

2. Kornilov will be shot down shortly afterward by a council of revolted soldiers.

3. Or Mensheviki, from "Minimalists," so called by opposition with the Bolsheviks, or "Maximalists," representing the left wing of the revolutionary movement.

4. “Disagreements arose between the colony of Petrograd (rather progressive) and that of Kiev (especially conservative), then among our compatriots of Kiev themselves. There was created in that city the extraordinary Ceskoslovensko Jednota (Czechoslovak Union), which began denouncing everyone, in particular myself and my so-called Westernism. These denunciations... found an audience among many people, even at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.” (Op. cit., p. 168.)

5. In view of the evolution of the situation (Ukraine proclaimed its independence on 24 January 1918 and Muraviev’s Soviet forces are approaching Kiev), the commander of the 2nd Czech Division opens neutrality talks with the Red troops. On 31 January 1918, an agreement is concluded at Jagotin. It is supplemented on 1 February by a clause indicating that this Convention is subject to no denunciation period and that it extends to all the Czechoslovak formations. On 8 February the Bolshevik army occupies Kiev. Negotiations are immediately resumed to settle relations between Soviet troops and Czechoslovak troops. They end on 10 February with the recognition of the armed neutrality of the Czechoslovak troops by General Muraviev. This agreement is confirmed by Kotsyubinsky, Soviet Secretary for Military Affairs in Ukraine. But on 18 March the Soviets change their attitude. They oppose the departure of the Czechoslovaks for Omsk, for they fear that their formations will make common cause with Semyonov and the Japanese. Finally, a new authorization to depart is given at Penza on 26 March, with Stalin’s agreement. (Cf. Beneš, Memoirs of War, p. 175 ff.) This will not prevent Muraviev from being recalled to Kazan and executed a month later by a political commissar for having concluded the agreement of 10 February.

[[PDF page 054]]

their arms. This time, it is not the unity of political representation that is in danger; it is the unity of action of the armed formations themselves.

At the moment when confusion is at its height, a new dramatic turn comes to upset everything yet again. On 3 March 1918, Trotsky signs the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with an Austro-Turkish-German delegation composed of Count Czernin, Talaat Pasha, General Hoffmann, and Mr. von Kühlmann. This treaty does not merely put an end to hostilities between the Soviet Government and the Central Empires; it opens wide all western Russia to Austro-German troops. These enter Courland, Lithuania, Estonia, and Ukraine. A fortnight later, they make their entry into Kiev. On 4 April, all Crimea is in their hands. One of the principal German war objectives has been attained...

To avoid being taken prisoner, the Czechs are obliged to withdraw toward the east. Their number now rises to nearly 50,000. A sullen anger grips the hearts of these men, whose columns painfully make a path toward the Volga. “The Bolsheviks have betrayed us! They have made a pact with the Germans!” This long cry of indignation spreads from one battalion to another. What an insane situation! For the Russians, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk puts an end to

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2. There is a risk of seeing some Czech regiments, which have remained neutral, open fire on other Czech units rallied to Communism. Moreover, General Sakharov tells us that in certain places where the Czech units are left to themselves, they hand their arms over to the Bolsheviks. Others, by contrast, where Tsarist cadres have remained, oppose this. The result is a series of skirmishes between Czechs and Bolsheviks. (Die Tschechischen Legionen in Sibirien, p. 32.)

[[PDF page 055]]

the war. But not for the Czechs, since France, England, and the United States continue the combat. Once again, they ask themselves what they must do and how they will extricate themselves from this dark imbroglio.

To make the situation still more dramatic, Trotsky, basing himself on one of the clauses of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, demands that all Czech combatants be immediately disarmed and penned in camps while waiting to be sent back to their country of origin. For the Czechs, this decision is equivalent to a death sentence. Some units, seized by panic, agree to surrender their arms. But the others refuse with the energy of despair. Will Trotsky's ultimatum unleash a war between Czechs and Bolsheviks? "It was," Masaryk would later declare, "one of those critical moments such as we have known many times."

From the point of view of international law, the Czech combatants are, properly speaking, an army without a state, since Czechoslovakia does not yet exist. The Russians consider them a foreign body dependent on no one; the Austrians, a rabble of traitors liable to capital punishment. And no doubt they would have had no other choice than to melt into the Red Army or be massacred if Masaryk had not intervened to spare them this tragic end.

The president of the Czech National Council of Paris has been in Russia since May 1917. As soon as the Tsar was overthrown, he went to Petrograd to enter into relations with Miliukov. During his journey, he met all the chiefs of the Allied military missions detached to the Russian High Command: General Niessel, General Knox, General Berthelot, and especially General Janin, more particularly charged with questions concerning the Czech units. He witnessed Kornilov's attempted coup d'état, Kerensky's fall, the crushing of the Mensheviks, and the advent of the Soviets. Masaryk never had any sympathy for the Tsarist regime and still less for the

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67. This demand seems to have been formulated at the request of Mr. von Mirbach, the new German ambassador in Moscow.

[[PDF page 056]]

White Russians who wished to resurrect it. But he also does not wish his compatriots to succumb to Bolshevik propaganda, or that they bring Communism back to Prague on the day when they return there. At a glance he measures the dangers of the situation and finds the means to guard against them with a lucidity and boldness that testify to his qualities as a statesman. In agreement with Štefánik, he lays down a series of measures that will ensure the salvation of his compatriots:

1. The Czech combatants, including all prisoners of war claiming this nationality, will henceforth bear the name "Legionaries."
2. All their forces must be consecrated exclusively to their new state.
3. They will observe strict neutrality in the combats opposing White Russians and Red Russians.
4. The Legionaries will remain armed. They will procure all additional matériel they might need by laying hands on the depots of the former Tsarist army.
5. All Russian cadres will be progressively eliminated and replaced by Czechs, in order to give the Legions a coherent and homogeneous character.
6. The Czechs will strive to regain the French front as quickly as possible and by the shortest route.
7. The Czech Army will henceforth form an integral part of the French Army.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. “It was necessary that this Sodom and Gomorrah of Tsarism disappear in iron and sulfur,” Masaryk writes. (Op. cit., p. 156.)

2. If that happened, Masaryk would have lost the game and would be before history only a Czechoslovak Kerensky. Already, Czech agitators sent by the Bolshevik Soviet of Kiev are striving to bring their comrades to leave their units in order to enlist in the Red Army (Masaryk, op. cit., p. 192). Furthermore, the Czech Communists have constituted their own Committee. They have founded a newspaper, The Pioneer, and occupied by force the premises of the National Committee in Moscow. They set themselves up as the only legal representatives of the Czech combatants and claim to monopolize their relations with the Soviet authorities. (Cf. Papoušek, op. cit., p. 69.)

8. “My principal concern was not to let ourselves be drawn into the Russian military chaos and to maintain the cohesion of our army.” (Id., p. 184.)

6. “Thanks to the collapse of the Russian army and to the general decomposition of Russia, we were able, without further formality, to furnish ourselves with matériel by taking it from the Russian military stores, which otherwise would simply have been looted. To a certain point, we used the tactic of the fait accompli; it was almost impossible to negotiate with the authorities, so great was the general uncertainty and so daily the changes in leading personnel.” (Masaryk, op. cit., p. 184.)

[[PDF page 057]]

Any attack of which it should be the object will be considered an aggression against the Allied Powers.
8. To mark this state of affairs clearly, the Legions will depend directly on a Franco-Anglo-Czech Commission presided over by General Janin. England will be represented there by General Knox, and the Czechs by General Štefánik.

In execution of paragraph 5, the Russian officers are progressively eliminated and replaced by Czech cadres, at whose head are General Tchetchek, General Sirový, and General Gayda. But when one tries to proceed to the repatriation of the Legions, the inter-Allied command runs into insurmountable difficulties. It is impossible to take the Murmansk route, for the Arctic Ocean is infested with German submarines and the convoys would be sunk before arriving at destination. The Black Sea route is likewise closed to them, for the presence of the Germans at Rostov and Tiflis bars them access to it. A single road remains open to them: that of the Trans-Siberian Railway. To return to their homeland, they will have to make their way to the Pacific Ocean by following the railway line that links Kazan to Vladivostok. This itinerary will oblige them to travel more than eight thousand kilometers across Siberia, Central Asia, Manchuria, and the Maritime Provinces. There they will have to face events still more dramatic than all those they have had to confront until now. That is why Czech historians will be inexhaustible in their praise of them and will compare their adventure to Xenophon’s Anabasis.

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3. This will not be possible everywhere, for the Czechs lack cadres. Thus the Russian colonels Stepanov, Bogoslavski, Ushakov, and General Dieterichs will continue to exercise commands within the Legion. (Cf. Sakharov, op. cit., p. 37 and 48-49.)

4. “Most of these men,” Sakharov remarks, “were chosen not for their military capacity, but for their loyalty toward the National Council of Paris.” (Op. cit., p. 32.)

6. A simple soldier, promoted directly to lieutenant, then to general, Sirový drew attention to himself in 1916 by his bravery during a reconnaissance mission. (See above, p. 42, note 2.)

7. Masaryk is anxious to preserve the Legions intact, for he sees in them the embryo of the future Czech national army.

9. By the so-called “Penza” agreement, concluded on 26 March 1918 (see above p. 50), the Soviet authorities authorize the movement of the Czechoslovak Legions toward the east. But they stipulate “that the Czech army corps will not move as a military unit, but as a convoy of free citizens, carrying with them a certain quantity of arms in order to defend themselves against attacks by counterrevolutionaries.” (Papoušek, op. cit., p. 67.)

[[PDF page 058]]

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Slowly, the Czech divisions set out toward the Urals. Soon they arrive at Samara, where the representatives of the moderate parties, driven from Petrograd by the Bolshevik revolution, have regrouped. Their vanguards have already made a first thrust along the Trans-Siberian Railway when they receive, from Paris, the order to stop and turn back.

Where does this reversal come from? From the fact that the offensives launched by Ludendorff on the western front cause grave apprehensions in the Allied High Command. The Germans, who have already drawn 40 divisions from the Russian front, possess a slight numerical superiority. If they were to draw still more in order to reinforce their divisions in Artois and Flanders, the Franco-British lines would risk being pierced. To prevent them from doing so, the Supreme Inter-Allied Council has decided to constitute a new front on the Volga with the help of the Czech divisions and all the Russian units stationed in Siberia which have not yet undergone the revolutionary contagion. To this end, the English, French, and Japanese launch the following proclamation to the populations:

Russian patriots!

Group yourselves around your national flag! Rush to arms! Drive out your enemies, the Germans and their lackeys, the Bolsheviks! Defend every inch of your territory! Never will the sovereignty of Russia be contested!

Encouraged by this appeal, and still more by the announcement that two Allied armies are flying to their rescue—a French army that has left Vologda and a Japanese army coming up from Vladivostok—

[[PDF page 059]]

the Russian and Czech formations resume the advance. They seize Ufa, Buzuluk, Syzran, Simbirsk, Schvalynsk, and Volsk, without great difficulty moreover, for the small contingents of Red Guards that have established themselves there are not strong enough to stand up to them. On 7 August they drive the Bolsheviks from Kazan, where the treasure of the Tsars is stored. Gold ingots, sacks of coin, and bundles of banknotes representing a value of several billion rubles are loaded onto five wagons and sent east, where they will serve to finance the counterrevolutionary movement. Following this success, General Sirový is promoted to divisional general and General Tchetchek, commander-in-chief of the

Volga front. The Czechs are celebrated everywhere as liberators. To thank them for their assistance, the Russians hand over to them an armored train captured from the Reds, which will enable them to establish liaison between their different echelons.

“The Whites are victorious! The Reds are in rout!” This news spreads all along the Trans-Siberian Railway, where it unleashes indescribable enthusiasm. Believing the Bolshevik regime already moribund, the Whites concentrate around the railway line, where they occupy Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, and Irkutsk. But their forces are neither homogeneous nor coordinated. At Samara, where Tchetchek has established his headquarters, power is exercised by a Socialist-Revolutionary Committee; at Uralsk and Orenburg, by Cossack regiments; at Yekaterinburg, by delegates of the mining industry; at Omsk, by an autonomous Siberian government; at Chita, by the Cossacks of Hetman Semyonov.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. At the request of the Americans, the Japanese occupied Vladivostok and the section of the Trans-Siberian Railway as far as Chita. But they will never go farther. As for the French army of Vologda, it never existed except in the imagination of propagandists. At most, it can only refer to the small expeditionary corps landed at Arkhangelsk, which will not move from there.

2. “The French Commandant Guinet insisted that a front on the Volga be maintained, in expectation of aid from an imaginary Allied army coming from Vologda. And our compatriots believed that a Czecho-Russian front on the Volga marked the resumption of the struggle against the Germans and Austrians.” (Masaryk, The Resurrection of a State, p. 282.)

3. From that moment, the Czechs installed a string of small advanced posts along the Trans-Siberian Railway, notably at Chelyabinsk, Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, and Khabarovsk.

[[PDF page 060]]

I
Arkhangelsk
Kotlas
Yekaterinburg
Tobolsk
Kazalinsk
Tashkent
CHINA
Journey of the Czech Legions

[[PDF page 061]]

Manchuria
Mukden
Vladivostok
Siberian Army
(Gen. Gayda)
Army of the West
(Gen. Hanshin, then Sakharov)
Army of Orenburg

(Hetman Dutov)
The Reds
1 March 1919
The Whites
The Reds, 15 April 1919
Attacks of the Whites
Retreat of the Reds
X Battles
Line of retreat of Kolchak's Army
Line of retreat of the Czechs
Railways
Across Siberia (1918-1919)

[[PDF page 062]]

Even Harbin and Vladivostok have particular administrations.

In order to put order into this anarchic situation and to place these various tendencies under a single government, Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries, and representatives of the national parties meet in congress at Ufa (September 1918). They elect a Directorate of five members, including two friends of Kerensky, Avksentiev and Chernov. This Directorate in turn appoints a ministry of National Union in which Admiral Kolchak assumes the functions of Minister of War and of the Navy.

But while the Whites are regrouping in Siberia, the Reds have not remained inactive. Under Trotsky's impetus, a new revolutionary army is beginning to spring from the ground. This makes its appearance on the front during the summer of 1918. On 9 September it retakes Kazan. Seeing neither the Japanese Army nor the phantom French Army arrive whose support had been promised to them, the Russo-Czech forces feel a wave of discouragement pass over them. How could they resist an enemy ten times superior in number? The Ural front rapidly dislocates. After Kazan and Simbirsk, Volsk, Schvalynsk, and Syzran are lost again in a few days. On 15 October, the Czechs abandon the Samara-Ufa line. "Why are we fighting?" they ask themselves in anguish. "Our only objective is the railway line."

Lost in the immensity of the steppes, having no news of the National Council of Paris—which they have nevertheless recognized as their legal Government—the Legionaries begin to escape the control of their officers and start looting the villages they pass through. To those of their chiefs who reproach them for this, they merely respond with shrugs of the shoulders. So many houses are abandoned! Nothing belongs to anyone anymore and everything left behind will be taken by the Reds... Besides, did Masaryk not tell them that they could pro-

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
3. "The morale of the Czechs has fallen to zero," declares an eyewitness, Captain W. Golotchek.

[[PDF page 063]]

cure everything they needed by laying hands on the depots of the former Tsarist army?

At the beginning, the civilian populations had seen in it only a lesser evil. "Take everything you want," they told the Legionaries, "but help us rid ourselves of the Bolshevik plague!" Now, their depredations take on such proportions that the unit commanders are overwhelmed by complaints. Colonel Švec,

whose regiment has distinguished itself by the scale of its exactions, gathers his men and implores them "not to become the dishonor of their nation." For answer, the soldiers hoot at him. When Colonel Švec loses his temper and threatens to punish them, one of the Legionaries approaches him and spits in his face. The others applaud him.

"Down with the officers!" they cry. "We have had enough of being commanded by bourgeois! Let us appoint our own chiefs, as is the custom in the Red Army!"

Desperate, Colonel Švec returns to his command post and shoots himself in the head. He is buried the next day beneath a gray and rainy sky. A group of Legionaries pays him final honors. But this tragic incident does not put an end to brigandage. During the following weeks, pillage and acts of insubordination multiply in disturbing fashion. How could an army resist anarchy when an entire empire is decomposing around it?

On 11 November 1918, the armistice is signed on the western front. At once, the Czechs have no further reason to fight. The independence of their country has just been proclaimed. They think of only one thing: returning to their homes. Everywhere they are in contact with the Reds, they systematically break off and withdraw toward the east. To accelerate their retreat, they seize several

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Masaryk himself is obliged to recognize the facts: "I would neither wish nor be able to defend everything that was done in the Legions after my departure from Russia," he writes in his Memoirs. (The Resurrection of a State, p. 281, 282.) But he attributes to Colonel Švec's suicide a "purifying action," of which one searches in vain for the trace...

[[PDF page 064]]

hundred locomotives and twenty thousand wagons. They pile into them all the booty they have grabbed along the way and prepare to cut for themselves by force a road to Vladivostok.

But their convoys rolling east run into other convoys coming in the opposite direction. Since the Trans-Siberian Railway is single-track, except at sidings where trains can pass one another, the result is a series of bottlenecks that prevent the arrival of ammunition and reinforcements of which the White Russians have the most pressing need. For if the Czechs, for their part, are losing interest in the struggle, the Whites are more determined than ever to continue it.

Kolchak, who has established his headquarters at Omsk, is thereby placed in a dramatic situation. To the west, the Red forces continue to advance. Framed by agents of the Cheka, they advance while burning villages and massacring populations. To the east, Communist agitators have appeared in the region of Irkutsk. In the center, disorder assumes frightening proportions. Paralyzed in his movements by the obstacles the Czechs put in the way of railway traffic, thwarted in his decisions by the tergiversations of the Directorate, Kolchak feels that he will not be long in being crushed if he does nothing to restore his authority. In the night of 18 November 1918, he gives the order to arrest the members of the Directorate, dissolves the Assembly, has a few recalcitrant deputies thrown into prison, and has himself proclaimed by the White Army "Regent and Supreme Ruler of All the Russias."

This new coup d'état does not surprise the Czechs. They have seen so many others! But it worries them, for they fear being enrolled by force into units of the White Army. In the night of 19 November, some of their regiments prepare to march on Omsk with the intention of overthrowing Kolchak. But the

attempt miscarries. The Admiral adopts a conciliatory attitude toward the mutineers, for he cannot fight both the Czechs and the Bolsheviks at the same time. Moreover, he does not wish to create additional enemies for himself.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Since the Czechs number about fifty thousand, this makes fewer than three Legionaries per wagon. The rest is occupied by the “requisitioned” goods.

HISTORY OF THE GERMAN ARMY, V: THE TRIALS OF STRENGTH (1938)
Benoist-Méchin

English translation — Section 2 of 10
PDF pages 065–116
Translation note: rapid, accuracy-focused translation from the corrected embedded text layer. No new OCR was performed. Page markers from the source text are preserved.

[[PDF page 065]]

complications with the Allies. Making a virtue of necessity, he summons General Sirovy to his headquarters and tries to find common ground with him.

“Why should the Czechs, the White Russians, and the Japanese—who already occupy a section of the Trans-Siberian Railway—not join forces to overthrow the Reds?” he suggests to him. “The Bolsheviks represent a threat to the whole world. If they win, they will make short work of your country... What glory would be yours, my dear general, if you returned to Prague at the head of a victorious army...”

Sirovy is a hard, one-piece man. With his low forehead and his right eye covered by a band of black taffeta, he bears a strange resemblance to Jan Žižka, called “the One-Eyed,” who commanded the Hussite warriors in the time of the religious wars. Like him, he is suspicious, realistic, and obstinate. He has never been seen to yield to flattery. Promoted general before reaching forty, he enjoys great prestige among the Legionaries because he has always refused to involve them in adventures and has never departed from the strictest neutrality. He also knows that Allied policy toward the Communists is changing, and that on the previous 10 April Masaryk advised Wilson to come to an understanding with them. Now is not the moment when he is going to change his conduct. He therefore bluntly rejects Kolchak’s proposals.

“So long as I have any say in the matter,” he answers in a curt tone, “no Czech will take part in the anti-Bolshevik crusade!”

Meanwhile, news of Kolchak’s coup d’état has reached the West. Masaryk and Benes are deeply disturbed by it.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. He is not unaware that the Czech divisions are under the protection of the Entente.

2. Masaryk memorandum to President Wilson, Tokyo, 10 April 1918: “The Allies should recognize the Bolshevik government de facto (there is no point discussing de jure recognition)... If the Allies are on

good terms with the Bolsheviks, they will be able to have influence over them. The Germans have recognized them (by making peace with them). I know the weak sides of the Bolsheviks, but I also know those of the other parties—they are neither better nor more capable... The monarchist movement is weak; the Allies must not support them. The Cadets and the Socialist-Revolutionaries are organizing against the Bolsheviks; I expect no important success from these parties."

[[PDF page 066]]

They have dispatched General Janin and General Stefanik to Omsk to find out what is happening there. The two men arrive around 15 November.

Stefanik is thirty-eight years old. He is a man still adorned with all the charms of youth, incapable of petty calculation, but for that very reason too inclined to attribute to others motives as disinterested as his own. "He conducted his action more as an apostle than as a diplomat and soldier," Masaryk tells us, adding: "We liked to call him the little drotar—after the Slovak mountaineers from the Žilina region who formerly roamed Central Europe as menders of earthenware and porcelain." But this is a drotar who has traveled across all the fronts and visited almost all the Allied ministries before being the guest of several sovereigns. More conservative in opinion than Benes and Masaryk, he seems, deep down, to have hoped that the White Russians would eventually triumph over the Reds.

He is therefore appalled by the disorganization prevailing on the Siberian front. Not only does it destroy his confidence in the offensive capacities of Kolchak's army, but the indiscipline shown by some units of Legionaries causes him the gravest anxiety. Are the Czech divisions going to disintegrate before they have reached their homeland?

Convinced that this slackening comes not so much from the men as from the quarrels that pit troop officers against political commissars, he dissolves, on his own authority, the local Czech Committee and reminds everyone—from commanders of the highest rank down to simple soldiers—that they form an integral part of the French Army and must obey, in that capacity, the orders of General Janin.

Poor Stefanik! Not only will his recommendations remain a dead letter, but they will earn him the double enmity of the officers and the commissars. The former cannot bear being subordinated to a foreigner; the latter cannot bear being stripped of their prerogatives. They send Masaryk an indignant telegram in which they present his initiatives in a tendentious light.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. "In politics," Masaryk writes, "he [Stefanik] did not always have a sense of the situation... In Siberia itself, he lacked clear-sightedness by not realizing the true situation of the army, and through insufficient knowledge of our compatriots and of the Russians, Kolchak, for example." (Op. cit., p. 112.)

[[PDF page 067]]

No longer knowing whom to believe, Masaryk recalls Stefanik to the West so that he can explain his attitude and provide him with a detailed report on the situation. Stefanik's face is dark as he climbs back into his airplane. Is he disillusioned by what he has just seen? Is he thinking of the difficulties awaiting his homeland? Or does he dimly foresee that he will never see it again? All these questions will remain unanswered, for during his return journey his airplane will be accidentally shot down by a Czech anti-aircraft battery as it flies over the territory of his native Slovakia (4 May 1919). The

circumstances of his death will never be clarified.

“He was an idealist,” Benes will say as a funeral oration.

Left alone in Siberia, General Janin finds himself facing a task that, to say the least, would require superhuman energy. But that is far from being the case. The head of the Allied military mission is a man of little stature who will quickly be overwhelmed by events. When General Lebedev, Kolchak’s chief of staff, asks that the Czechs evacuate their wagons in order to clear the tracks and settle in houses built along the railway, the Legionaries categorically refuse and declare that they will defend their wagons to the last cartridge. To avoid an incident, General Janin sides with them and forces the Russian staff to abandon its plan. The Czechs will therefore remain in their tepluschki, and traffic on the Trans-Siberian Railway will remain paralyzed...

Kolchak’s situation therefore seems badly compromised when a sudden and extravagant personage, even more picturesque than Prince Bermondt-Avalov, appears in the foreground: General Radola Gayda.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. “Before leaving again,” General Constantin Sakharov tells us, “he confided to us [that is, to the Russians] that his stay in Siberia had dispelled his last illusions.” (Die Tschechischen Legionen in Sibirien, p. 56.)

2. They do not want to part with the booty piled up in them.

3. This is what heated military wagons are called in Russia, built to transport forty men or eight horses.

[[PDF page 068]]

A former Czech pharmacy student, Rudolf Geidl—for that is his real name—was mobilized in 1914 as a corporal-orderly in the Austrian Army. Taken prisoner by the Montenegrins in 1915, he escaped from his camp after destroying his identity papers and enlisted as a medical officer in the Montenegrin Army, where he served as an army doctor until Montenegro’s collapse in 1916. After that, having decided to continue his adventurous career in Russia, he shipped clandestinely aboard a cargo vessel that brought him to Odessa. Arriving in Ukraine, he entered—still under his false name—the Czech brigade, with the rank of staff captain. From that moment on, he rapidly climbed all the rungs of the hierarchy. Shortly afterward he is found commanding the 7th Infantry Regiment, then the 2nd Division. The National Committee in Paris appointed him general, although Stefanik had demanded his expulsion from the army during his visit to Omsk. No one knows exactly who he is or where he comes from. But one thing is certain: this colorful personage is a dangerous megalomaniac.

General Sakharov, who met him several times, especially in October 1918 at Ekaterinburg, gives the following portrait of him: “He was a young blond man of medium height, whose narrow face had the pallor of a wax mask. Two deep furrows framed his mouth. His hard, almost colorless eyes gave his physiognomy an expression of rapacity. His thin voice contrasted with his chopped elocution. He was plainly posing as a war leader and a hero.”

Gayda’s opinions are no less marked than his features. “At this moment, the Russian people have no use for parliamentarism,” he tells General Sakharov from their first meeting.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. In 1917, during his stay in Kiev, Gayda had been indicted for fraud and brought before a military tribunal. But the matter had been hushed up. It had nevertheless left enough traces for Stefanik to be able to invoke “reasons of morality and general policy” to justify his request for dismissal, and for the Münchener Neueste Nachrichten to publish, in its issues of 25 and 26 January 1928, articles entitled “When a swindler becomes chief of the general staff” (Der Hochstapler als Generalstabschef) without ever receiving a denial.

[[PDF page 069]]

“I have crossed Russia and Siberia twice. During my travels I was able to see that everyone was tired of the revolution and that everyone longed for order and tranquility. In my opinion, the regime best suited to Russia is a good constitutional monarchy. But it is still too early to establish it. In the meantime, the only possible solution is a military dictatorship. I would willingly support, with my regiments, the Russian general capable of imposing it.”

With such a program, the former pharmacy student can only be at daggers drawn with the local Czech Committee. Moreover, he has a particular bugbear: General Sirovy. He hates him, not only because of his political opinions, but because of his popularity. In everything, Gayda wants to be first. That is why he always takes the opposite line from his rival. Since Sirovy wants to keep the Legions away from combat, he will support their intervention. Since Sirovy wants to remain neutral, he will take Kolchak’s side. Of all the Czech officers, he is the only one to send him a telegram of congratulations on the day after his coup.

The former commander-in-chief of the Russian Black Sea Fleet is in too critical a position not to accept any help, wherever it comes from. A sensitive and generous temperament who fights like a paladin “for God and for the Tsar,” he is pleasantly surprised to find a Czech who understands him. But his incurable romanticism masks reality from him and prevents him from judging men correctly. In the end, it will not be his incapacity that destroys him—as has wrongly been claimed—but his excessive goodness.

At the beginning of 1919, he invites Gayda to his headquarters and tells him his intentions.

“We cannot retreat indefinitely,” he says. “The hour has come to regroup all our forces and launch them in a supreme assault against the Bolsheviks. If we wait until summer, it will be too late. I have therefore decided to act in the coming spring.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. It resumed its activities immediately after Stefanik’s departure. Its principal members were Bogdan Pawlu, former Committee delegate to the Omsk Directorate, Dr. Girša, Parteidel, Médek, and Blagosch.

[[PDF page 070]]

“For this purpose, I am in the process of forming three armies: 1. the Siberian Army; 2. the Western Army, whose command I intend to entrust to General Hanshin; 3. the Orenburg Army, which is currently regrouping under the orders of Hetman Dutov. With the Urals at their back, they will take the offensive toward Samara. After that, they will drive westward to liberate Nizhny Novgorod and Moscow.”

Gayda listens to the Admiral attentively. He multiplies signs of approval, flatters him, and insinuates himself into his good graces.

“Admiral,” he answers enthusiastically, “you are the providential man Russia has been waiting for! You may count on my absolute devotion...”

Kolchak is delighted to find so understanding a listener.

“To prove to you all the confidence I place in you,” the Admiral continues, “I offer you command of the Siberian Army...”

Gayda himself cannot believe his ears.

“You do me great honor... After all, I do not say no... But will your compatriots obey me?”

“I will give orders accordingly,” Kolchak replies confidently, “and I will attach General Dieterichs to you as chief of staff.”

Gayda accepts with the eagerness one may imagine...

In the first days of March 1919, the Russian armies deploy along the line planned for the offensive. In the north, the Siberian Army, commanded by General Gayda, occupies the sector between Perm and Glazov. In the center, the Western Army (General Hanshin) takes position before Ufa. In the south, the Orenburg Army (Hetman Dutov) masses between Orsk and Orenburg. Kolchak goes to Ekaterinburg, accompanied by General Sakharov, to inspect the troops of the Siberian Army. Gayda awaits them on the station platform.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. General Dieterichs succeeded General Dukhonin after the latter’s assassination at Mogilev (see above, p. 51, note 1). During his journey in Russia, Masaryk appointed him chief of staff of the Legion because of his pro-Czech opinions. “He was a faithful servant of the Entente,” he tells us. Gayda therefore has no reason to reject him.

2. See the map, p. 56-57.

[[PDF page 071]]

He has a haughty and self-satisfied air. The Russian hymn sounds. A guard of honor presents arms. The procession crosses the station and comes out onto the main square. What are Kolchak and Sakharov’s astonishment when they see there a cavalry squadron whose men are dressed in an extravagant uniform. They wear the braided dolman of the Circassians and are decked out in the caftan usually reserved for regimental choristers.

“To which branch does this detachment belong?” Sakharov asks Gayda, surprised by the appearance of these operetta extras.

“It is my personal escort,” Gayda replies laconically.

“What a strange uniform!” Sakharov cannot help remarking. “Did you invent it?”

“Not at all, my general,” Gayda replies. “It is a historical uniform.”

“How so?”

“All the great personages of Russia, your Tsar for example and Grand Duke Nicholas, never traveled without their Caucasian escort. I thought I needed one too, for the day when I make my solemn entry into Moscow...”

Sakharov’s astonishment increases further when he reviews the shock troops constituting the reserves of the Siberian Army. One battalion in particular attracts his attention. It wears brown shoulder straps on which the letters “B. B. I. G. G.” stand out.

“What do these letters mean?” Sakharov asks.

Gayda keeps a disdainful silence. An orderly officer answers in his place:

“They mean the Immortal Battalion of General Gayda.”

Sakharov is left breathless. But things become still more difficult when the modalities of the offensive are discussed. In the middle of the conference, Gayda demands to be appointed commander-in-chief of the entire front, and for General Hanshin and Hetman Dutov to be placed under his orders. Kolchak protests that this is impossible. But since Gayda threatens to withdraw if he does not obtain satisfaction,

[[PDF page 072]]

the Admiral consents to let him exercise command over the Western Army, while limiting his authority to operational questions.

A more unfortunate decision could scarcely have been made, for Gayda and the Russian generals view the battle from diametrically opposed angles. While the Russians have only one idea—to free Moscow from Soviet control—Gayda wants to march north to make contact with the Allied expeditionary corps stationed at Arkhangelsk.

“Why let yourself be shut up in Siberia like a wolf in its den?” he asks Kolchak. “Instead, make a breakthrough toward the sea. That is where you will be able to receive food, munitions, and reinforcements. After that, you will be free to march on Leningrad and Moscow...”

It is possible that this plan is the more judicious one. But Kolchak fears that Gayda has chosen it because it would allow him to leave Russia. Gayda, for his part, begins to wonder whether Admiral Kolchak is really the great strategist he had imagined. The two men part in a tense atmosphere.

The result of these divergences soon appears. Gayda having published a proclamation insulting to the Russians, Kolchak orders General Sakharov to restore operational autonomy to the Western Army. When the offensive begins, the three armies attack along different axes. Gayda—faithful to his plan—marches northwest toward Arkhangelsk; the Western Army advances toward Bugulma, while the Orenburg Army carries out a turning movement toward Buzuluk.

At first, things go relatively well. The Reds are disconcerted by the vigor of the attack, which allows

the Western Army to advance some four hundred kilometers toward Moscow. But around 15 April, a dangerous gap opens between General Gayda's army and General Hanshin's. The Red forces pour into it. Disorder seizes the Whites, who fear being turned. To increase the confusion still further, the "Immortal Battalion of General Gayda" goes over to the Bolsheviks with weapons and baggage. Soon disorder turns into rout.

[[PDF page 073]]

Left alone at his command post, Gayda bellows incoherent orders and accuses the Russians of being the cause of this debacle. The Russians retort that responsibility rests exclusively with the Czechs. As at Zborov and Kazan, they disengaged too early. Ah! the generals of Nicholas II were quite right to say that he who has betrayed once will betray all his life! The quarrel becomes so bitter that Kolchak is forced to intervene. To remove Gayda from the front, he assigns him a post in his staff and looks for a replacement. Drunk with rage, Gayda threatens to provoke a mutiny among his troops if the Regent persists in his intentions. Then Kolchak, finally losing patience, removes him from his command and expels him from the army. Ulcerated, Gayda boards his special train, invokes General Janin's protection, and flees to Vladivostok.

Arriving there, he tries to foment a Communist uprising, to avenge the humiliation inflicted on him by the Admiral. But his attempt is quickly smothered. Arrested by a group of White Russian officers, he is slapped in public and definitively discredited. He will not reappear on the Siberian front.

Sirovy triumphs: his rival is eliminated. But for Kolchak, the battle of the Urals ends in disaster. Perm is lost without a fight, along with the whole Volga river flotilla. Harried by the Reds, the Whites flow back eastward. Around 15 June, they succeed in regrouping on the Ekaterinburg-Chelyabinsk-Troitsk line. At Chelyabinsk, the fighting is exceptionally violent. The city changes hands several times before being captured by the Reds. As a precaution, Kolchak leaves Omsk and transfers his headquarters to Tomsk.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. When Gayda returned to Prague in 1919, he received a mixed welcome from his compatriots. Not knowing how to rid itself of this embarrassing personage (whom it nevertheless did not dare attack head-on), the Czechoslovak government sent him to Paris to complete his military education by attending the École de Guerre. Citing his title of army commander, Gayda refused to sit among the other students and demanded that a special armchair be installed for him beside the professor's lectern. His arrogance and ignorance prompted Marshal Foch to make the following remark: "I wonder what the Czechs were thinking when they sent us such a bird." Back in Prague, Gayda was gradually eliminated from the army. Then devoting himself to "business," he was compromised in a dubious affair involving the delivery of industrial secrets to Soviet agents. He was indicted before the courts, but the Czech government intervened to hush up the case. After that, Gayda will not be heard of again until 18 March 1938, the date on which Gayda invited his compatriots to collaborate with the Germans.

[[PDF page 074]]

Whence comes the superiority the Bolsheviks suddenly display? It is due to the fact that they have recently been commanded by a leader full of dash: General Tukhachevsky. A year earlier, he issued to his troops the famous order of the day, recalling Bonaparte's proclamations to the Army of Italy:

"Comrades, what is our aim? To cut off the counter-revolutionaries from the fertile plains of Siberia.

For that, we must march forward without delay. We must take the offensive. The slightest delay is a step toward death!”

Without losing an instant, Tukhachevsky drives toward the Tobol River. Soon the advance guards of the 5th Red Army reach Tobolsk and Ishim. But the 3rd White Army, now commanded by General Sakharov, opposes them with fierce resistance. It knows that if it gives way, Siberia will be lost, and with it all hope of overthrowing the Soviet regime. It therefore defends itself stubbornly, inflicting severe losses on the enemy. Little by little, the Red assaults weaken. Short of ammunition and literally exhausted, they finally fall back behind the Tobol River. “If only we had been able at that moment to dispose of 10,000 Czech Legionaries, out of the roughly 50,000 who were on the spot and were watching us with folded arms,” Sakharov writes, “the fate of the world would have been changed.”

But the collapse of the Ural front has sounded the death knell of Russo-Czech military collaboration. Frightened by General Gayda’s initiative, Masaryk has sent to Omsk a delegation chaired by Senator Krejci,

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3. It is constituted by the regrouping of the remaining elements of the Siberian Army and the Western Army. The Orenburg Army has been driven back toward the southeast, in the direction of the Aral Sea.

5. As well as by the reports sent to him by Messrs. Pawlu and Girsa, denouncing the reactionary character, even the Germanophilia, of Admiral Kolchak. As for this latter accusation, which also appears in General Janin’s dispatches, it seems to have been put into circulation by Sirovy after the interview in which Kolchak spoke to him of a German-Russian-Japanese crusade to crush the Bolsheviks.

[[PDF page 075]]

to notify Admiral Kolchak that the Czechs will no longer take part in any fighting. At the same time, General Janin and General Sirovy make the arrangements necessary to accelerate their repatriation. Without stopping at the protests of the Trans-Siberian Railway agents, they have the few Russian trains still running shunted onto sidings, to give priority to the Legionary convoys.

From October 1919 onward, Russo-Czech relations are practically broken off and Kolchak finds himself in a desperate situation...

An immense plain unfolding over thousands of kilometers; a soil that each year covers itself with a thick fleece of grain; farther north, dark and impenetrable forests whose area is several times that of Western Europe; to the south, giant mountains, strangely jagged, crowned with peaks where the human voice has never yet resounded and cut by ravines at the bottom of which enormous deposits of metals and precious stones, oil and coal, lie dormant: such is Siberia, that blessed land, filled with riches of every kind.

But everything changes when late autumn arrives, for the Siberian winter is very long and very harsh. For five months of the year—from the beginning of November to the beginning of April—Siberia sleeps beneath a thick mantle of snow. The wind blows in gusts and the thermometer falls to thirty degrees below zero. Such is the grandiose and desolate setting in which the last act of the drama will unfold.

The halt of the Bolshevik forces behind the Tobol River was brief: just enough time to catch their breath and receive reinforcements. At the end of October, the 5th Red Army, whose strength has been doubled, resumes the offensive eastward,

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1. F. V. Krejčí, U Sibirske Armady, Prague, 1922. Krejčí was a member of the Czech Social Democratic Party and, as such, fundamentally hostile to the White Russians.

2. “Their role is not to put a Tsar back on the throne of Russia, but to defend the Republic in their own country,” Krejčí writes in one of his memoranda. On this point—as on many others—he shared the ideas of Masaryk and Sirovy.

[[PDF page 076]]

and this time it soon breaks through the enemy front. On 3 November 1919, it seizes Tobolsk; on the 15th, it enters Omsk, having advanced an average of thirty kilometers per day.

While Tukhachevsky’s battalions drive ever deeper into central Siberia, the retreat of the White Army takes on the aspect of a catastrophe, for it is accompanied by a massive exodus of the populations. Terrified by the approach of the Reds and feeling themselves no longer defended by anything, hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children, who dread falling alive into the hands of the Cheka, flee across the plain—on foot, on horseback, in carts, in sledges—under a fine light snow that falls without stopping. Their long gray columns emerge from the mist only to plunge back into it at once. The stations resound with death-rattles and groans. These are the thousands of wounded and dying abandoned to their fate, for there are no doctors, no nurses, no medicines. Alone, in this dreadful debacle, the Czech divisions form a compact and hard core. Advancing like icebreakers through the crowd, they desperately try to open a path to the sea and progress while massacring all German, Austrian, and Hungarian prisoners of war whom they meet on their way. For although for them the war is over, they nevertheless regard the nationals of these countries as their eternal enemies, with whom they have a centuries-old account to settle.

As though the situation were not chaotic enough, it is suddenly learned that a Communist government has taken power at Irkutsk, blocking any retreat toward Vladivostok and separating Kolchak’s forces from those of Hetman Semyonov, who occupy, beyond Irkutsk, the section of railway connecting Chita to Harbin.

Surrounded on every side, the White Army is now on the verge of collapse. Everything is lacking: food,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. 14 May 1918: Chelyabinsk incident, where a Hungarian prisoner is massacred by a group of Legionaries. 5-12 July 1918: massacre of twenty Hungarians at the Nikolsk-Ussuriisk camp. 30 July 1918: massacre of German colonists at Orenburg and Samara; massacre of five Sudeten Germans at Kansk. Beginning of October 1918: massacre of a group of Sudeten German musicians at Khabarovsk, whose bodies are thrown into the Amur River. 1919: murder of Hungarian agricultural workers in Siberia, especially at Krasnoyarsk. 29-30 July 1919: massacre of Hungarian prisoners at Wojeny, Gorodok, etc. (Reports of the International Red Cross.)

[[PDF page 077]]

arms, means of transport. The Czechs have monopolized everything. If their blood begins to boil whenever they encounter Austrian, Hungarian, or German prisoners, it is with impotent rage that the White Russians watch their convoys pass, heavily loaded with the food and equipment of which they themselves are so cruelly short. They inform Kolchak of their indignation. Not content with deserting the battlefield, the Czechs are plundering Russia! Furious, Kolchak orders their trains to be stopped by all possible means, “even if it means blowing up the tunnel they have to use.” At the same time, he telegraphs Hetman Semyonov not to let any Legionary convoy pass without carefully inspecting its baggage.

By taking these decisions, Kolchak has signed his own death warrant, for they carry Czech hostility toward the White Russians to its height. For five years these stubborn and realistic peasants have been away from their country. They have been hurled into an uninterrupted whirlwind of battles, revolutions, armistices, and coups de force. Along the way they have accumulated a mass of heterogeneous objects which for them represent a fortune and which they are fully determined to take home. Thus they are resolved to shoot down on the spot anyone who tries to dispossess them of it. “The conflict is now open between Kolchak and us,” Krejci writes to Masaryk. “That is why a new government must be formed in Siberia, supported by the elements of the left and capable of reassuring the socialist and revolutionary leaders. That is what Dr. Girša has been working on for some time in Irkutsk.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. “One cannot say that our troops are tired,” writes Alexander Kotomkin. “They have never been in better physical condition, and we would be giving the Republic a fine gift by bringing them back intact, for they constitute 12 infantry regiments, 2 cavalry regiments, 3 artillery regiments with first-rate equipment and overabundant arms stocks, as well as 12,000 of the best horses in Siberia bought for a song. Soldiers and officers are well trained, the staffs know their business. In short, everything is for the best.” (Über die Tschechoslovakischen Legionen in Sibirien, 1919 bis 1920. Erinnerungen und Dokumente, p. 66.)

3. Tires, printing equipment, machine tools, sewing machines, scythes, plows, agricultural machines, sugar, tea, linen. Not all of it, moreover, was stolen; part of this equipment was bought cheaply by the Legion quartermaster service, thanks to funds placed at its disposal by the Allied governments. The soldiers, in fact, do not receive their entire pay. A fraction is withheld and paid into a “Legionaries’ Cooperative Bank,” which will make profitable purchases on their behalf, for many Russian civilians leaving their villages prefer to liquidate their goods rather than let them fall into the hands of the Bolsheviks.

4. They regard this booty as just compensation for their hardships.

[[PDF page 078]]

Forced to fall back constantly under the pressure of Tukhachevsky’s divisions, Kolchak will soon come up against the Communist Committees that have seized power at Irkutsk and Goloustnoye. Perhaps at that moment he regrets not having followed Gayda’s advice and not having allowed his armies to move north toward the White Sea. Now he is well and truly shut up “like a wolf in his den.” All the more so because the orders he gave to stop the Czech convoys have had only one result: to create a monstrous bottleneck at Taiga. For several kilometers there is nothing but an inextricable tangle of wagons and locomotives that can move neither forward nor backward.

Literally at bay, Kolchak turns to General Janin and begs him to use his authority to check the advance

of the Reds.

“That is impossible,” Janin answers him. “One cannot stem a tidal wave. I am even obliged to tell you that I can no longer guarantee your safety if you insist on remaining at Tomsk. I strongly advise you to withdraw farther east.”

Kolchak then commits an error that will be fatal to him. Trusting Janin’s advice, he separates himself from his army. After having a track cleared by laying all the obstructing vehicles over on the embankment, he leaves for Krasnoyarsk with his personal guard and his staff in a convoy composed of four trains and a set of five wagons containing the Tsars’ treasure.

On learning of Kolchak’s departure, the remnants of the White regiments, already fairly dislocated, break contact with the Reds and hastily fall back eastward so as not to lose contact with their leader.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Taiga station is a railway junction where the line from Tomsk joins the main line. “Only the first trains had succeeded in passing, in the direction of Lake Baikal,” writes the Tokyo newspaper Dielo Rossii (no. 14). “All the others had remained blocked. Many of them contained old people, women, and sick persons, most of whom were massacred by the Reds. The rest succumbed to cold and typhus. Rare were those who succeeded in escaping this hell. On one side, the Bolsheviks arrived; on the other, death awaited them in the immense frozen forests of Siberia. Whatever they did, they could not escape their fate.”

3. The White Russians blame the Czechs; Krejčí and Steidler blame General Janin. (Die Tschechoslovakische Bewegung in Russland, p. 103.) He allegedly told Kolchak “that once he had reached the zone controlled by the Japanese, he would have nothing more to fear.”

[[PDF page 079]]

As a result, the rear guard is formed by a Polish division and a Serbian regiment, of which no one knows exactly how they got there. The Red advance guards take them prisoner.

It is then the Czechs’ turn to form the rear guard and to find themselves in contact with the Bolsheviks. On 11 January 1920, they send envoys to the staff of the 5th Red Army to ask to be allowed to leave without being molested. But the Reds do not understand it that way. Drunk with the capture of the Poles and Serbs, they impose draconian conditions on the Czech Army:

1. All evacuation toward the east will be stopped immediately;
2. The Czechs will hand over all their weapons and equipment;
3. The whole Czech army will be taken prisoner;
4. It will be transported westward under Soviet guard.

Among the Czechs there is only one cry of indignation. They protest; they declare that these conditions are unacceptable. At once the Red artillery opens fire on them.

For the Legionaries, the hostility of the Bolsheviks is the supreme disappointment. They believed they had won them over by their neutrality. They suddenly perceive that this is not so, that the Soviet leaders do not intend to make any distinction between them and the White Russians. This is what Gayda’s intervention has brought them! They realize with horror that they are just as encircled as Kolchak. But

then how will they cross the Red zone of Irkutsk? Are they not going to come up against a barrier there too? To extricate themselves from this hornet's nest, there is only one solution: deliver Kolchak to the Reds, along with his treasure. His head and the Tsar's ingots will be the price of their passage...

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Colonel Boldirev believes that the Czechs delivered them to the Reds, "for Czechs and Poles could not stand each other." Steidler, for his part, writes: "Poles and Serbs surrendered without fighting to a small detachment of Bolsheviks."

2. It seems that these conditions were drafted by Frunze, political commissar with the 5th Red Army.

3. Negotiations in this direction are immediately undertaken by M. Blagosch, one of the members of the local Czech Committee. The argument he would later use to justify his action is that "Kolchak had become our enemy by giving the order to blow up the tunnels we had to use. This decision was equivalent to an act of war."

[[PDF page 080]]

Until now, the Czechs have done nothing to stop Kolchak's five trains. But at Krasnoyarsk, the convoy is cut apart. The Czechs immobilize the three trains containing the Admiral's guard. Only the one carrying Kolchak himself and the five wagons containing the imperial treasure are allowed to continue their journey.

When the two trains approach Nizhne-Udinsk station, a truck placed across the track forces them to stop. They are immediately surrounded by a detachment of Czechs armed with machine guns. The Admiral forbids his small escort to react before he has been able to contact General Janin. He tries to reach the head of the Allied Mission by telegraph. But in vain. Janin has withdrawn to Vladivostok, for the situation in Irkutsk has become untenable.

Finally, Kolchak's appeals reach the head of the Allied Mission.

"Resign yourself to the inevitable," the latter answers. "Place yourself under the protection of the Czechs! If you refused, I would be obliged to decline all responsibility for what follows. I remind you that Czech protection is itself guaranteed by the Entente Powers."

To confirm this fact, five flags—French, English, American, Japanese, and Czechoslovak—are hoisted on Kolchak's wagon. Reassured by Janin's declarations, the Admiral accepts Czech protection. The last White Russian soldiers who guarded the corridors of his wagon are withdrawn and replaced by Legionaries.

Slowly, the train starts moving again. Arriving at Cheremkhovo, several Bolshevik formations made up of workers employed in the coal mines attack the convoy to seize the wagons containing the stock of gold. The Czechs settle the incident by a compromise: they incorporate a certain number of Red Guards into the surveillance troops.

Approaching Irkutsk, the Czech commander responsible for the security of the train is seized with scruples.

[[PDF page 081]]

He goes up to several Russian officers in the Admiral's entourage and says to them in a low voice:

"Save yourselves quickly! A trap has been set for you! Your situation is hopeless!"

"What danger threatens us?" the astonished Russians ask. "Is our safety not guaranteed by the Allied governments?"

The Czech commander maintains a disturbing silence.

The night passes in anguish.

The next day, 5 February 1920, as the train enters Irkutsk station, it is shunted onto a siding. Kolchak sees a Japanese convoy stopped not far away on a parallel track. He sends his aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Trubchaninov, to call for help. But the Czechs prevent him from crossing the platform, so that Trubchaninov has to turn back without accomplishing his mission. A few meters away, the Japanese come and go, suspecting nothing. They are unaware of the tragedy taking place before their eyes and are convinced that the Admiral is perfectly safe.

At 4 p.m., a Czech officer enters Kolchak's compartment. He informs him that the decision has been taken to hand him over to the Revolutionary Committee of Irkutsk.

"But by what right?" Kolchak asks in a strangled voice.

"I received the order from General Sirovy!"

"That is impossible!" Kolchak cries. "General Janin guaranteed my safety. Otherwise, what would the five Allied flags hoisted on my wagon mean?"

The Czech officer lowers his eyes and keeps an embarrassed silence.

"So the Allies have betrayed me!" groans the Admiral, collapsing onto his bench. "We have been abandoned..."

At 7 p.m., a representative of the Revolutionary Government of Irkutsk bursts into the compartment, followed by half a dozen Red Guards. He places Kolchak and the officers accompanying him under arrest and conducts them under escort to the municipal prison. The next morning, Kolchak is charged with high treason before the People's Tribunal.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Testimony of Lieutenant Trubchaninov. "It is better not to insist too much on what happened next," writes Sir Samuel Hoare, who had just carried out at that time an observation mission in Siberia for the British government, "for an Allied officer, though not British, handed Kolchak over to the Czechs along with his treasure. The Czechs delivered them to the Bolsheviks. The outcome was fatal." (The Fourth Seal, London, p. 304-305.)

[[PDF page 082]]

Almost at the same hour, a Czech delegation and a Bolshevik delegation, meeting in the waiting room

of the little station at Kuitun, conclude an agreement concerning the delivery of the gold wagons and the free passage of the Czech divisions through the territory of Irkutsk. Its paragraph 5 specifies:

The Czech regiments entrust Admiral Kolchak and those among his supporters who have been arrested by the Revolutionary Committee of Irkutsk to the custody of the Soviet Forces. They undertake not to interfere in any way with the decisions that the Soviet authorities may deem it necessary to take with regard to the said prisoners.

As for the shipment of gold, four wagons out of five are handed over against receipt to the representatives of the Revolutionary Committee. The fifth, filled with sacks containing 5-rouble pieces, was pillaged during the night, with the complicity of the Czech sentries responsible for guarding it. Thus 200 quintals of gold disappear, representing approximately 20 million roubles.

News of the Admiral's arrest has spread through the whole region like wildfire. At Chita, Hetman Semyonov dispatches to Irkutsk a commando placed under the orders of General Skipetrov. At Krasnoyarsk and Kansk, the remnants of the White Army commanded by General Sakharov rush toward Irkutsk in the hope of saving their leader.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. M. Krejčí, delegate of the Czech National Committee in Siberia, provides the following details on these events: "The Political Center of Irkutsk, under pressure from Bolshevik revolutionary commandos, demanded that General Janin deliver Kolchak. Resigning himself to the inevitable, General Janin gave orders accordingly. When the Admiral's train entered Inokentjevsk station, Blagosch, plenipotentiary of the Czech government in Irkutsk, summoned A. B. Kosminsky, representative of the revolutionary government, to his office to negotiate Kolchak's delivery with him. Around 6 p.m., the two men went to the station, where the prisoners were guarded under watch by a mixed Russo-Czech surveillance detachment. The train commander, the Czech Krawak, asked Kosminsky in what form the handing over of the prisoners should take place. He was answered that Admiral Kolchak's fate would be settled by a commission composed of members of the Political Center and the staff of the Red Army. This commission would then hand Kolchak over to the competent commission of the nearest Cheka. The aforesaid commission appeared at the station at 7 p.m. On the order of its chief, the former Regent of Russia was conducted under escort to the municipal prison, where he was placed under high surveillance." (U Sibirske Armady, Prague, 1922, p. 244.)

[[PDF page 083]]

All night long, Cossacks and infantrymen race at full speed through the snow squalls, driven by the fear of arriving too late. Almost at the same moment, Smirnov, the all-powerful People's Commissar for Siberian affairs, telegraphs the Revolutionary Committee of Irkutsk to order it to stay Kolchak's judgment and transfer him to Moscow, where the Supreme Soviet intends to stage a great show trial.

But the Czechs have no wish to see Kolchak appear before a tribunal, where he might call the world to witness the conditions under which he was handed over to his enemies. They go to the Revolutionary Committee and press it to "liquidate" the prisoners before their supporters can come to free them. Already, the news that White forces are flying to their aid has caused dangerous excitement among the population. At any moment, Skipetrov and Sakharov may burst into the city. Then the Czechs will no longer be answerable for anything...

These fears are not unjustified. The next day, in the first hours of daylight, Sakharov's advance guards

have arrived at Inokentjevsk station, a few kilometers northwest of Irkutsk. They are preparing to march on the city when they receive a message from the commander of the 2nd Czech Division saying: “We will make common cause with the Reds and fight against you if you advance one step further!” To the east, the Czechs have stopped General Skipetrov. After disarming his troops and pillaging his armored wagon, they have laid hands on the 8 million roubles that Semyonov had entrusted to him to foment an uprising among the civilian population.

But even if they had been victorious, Skipetrov and Sakharov would have arrived too late. In the first hours of the day, Kolchak and the members of his suite were shot. From the prison courtyard were heard the cries “Long live Russia! Long live the Tsar!” followed by the dry crack of several volleys. Wide pools of blood stained the snow.

[[PDF page 084]]

With Kolchak there collapsed a world that would not be seen again (7 February 1920)...

When they learn that their chief has been executed, the generals of the White Army feel their courage falter. In the course of the afternoon, they hold a council of war. What should be decided? Where should they go? From whom could they expect help? A rapid examination of the situation shows that the infantry units have only ten to fifteen cartridges per man left, and that the artillery has entirely exhausted its ammunition. The exhaustion of bodies is matched only by the disarray of souls. Soldiers are seen staggering along the railway line and lying down in the snow, never to rise again. The stations are assaulted by haggard crowds, mingled with bands of marauders. The railway tracks are not only obstructed by rolling stock. They are bordered by heaps of corpses stiffened by the cold. At twilight, all this forms a hallucinatory spectacle.

After conferring, the generals agree that there is only one solution left: to try, at any cost, to reach Hetman Semyonov’s forces. But since it is impossible to pass through Irkutsk, they must skirt the city under cover of darkness and head south across Lake Baikal, which at this season is covered by a thick layer of ice.

Then, in the falling evening, there is a desperate flight, a general save-who-can. By the thousands, little sledges dash onto the frozen carapace, carrying the remnants of the army in rout. Desperate, the officers raise their hands toward heaven. They invoke the shades of the Emperor to whom they have sacrificed everything. They beg him to descend toward them to bring them help, not to abandon them in the hour of their supreme distress. But from the silent sky, only night descends...

The next day, the last vestiges of the White Army have vanished. And the surface of the lake, indifferent to the torment of men, sparkles under a pale sun as if nothing had happened.

[[PDF page 085]]

For the White Russians, the Siberian tragedy is consummated. For the Czechs, the last obstacle has been removed from the road home. After taking the time to conclude an agreement with the Revolutionary Committee, the 2nd Czech Division leaves Irkutsk at the end of February. Before evacuating the city, it appropriates all the gold from the Municipal Treasury, where it finds, besides a mass of 1,000-rouble notes, securities, lottery tickets, and 5,000-rouble shares of the Bank of Russia, which it heaps pell-mell into its wagons. Added to the quintals of gold “taken” from the Tsars’ treasure and to the 8 million roubles taken from General Skipetrov, these funds—or at least what remains of

them—will swell the reserves of the “Legionaries’ Bank.”

Arriving in Manchuria, the Czech fighters breathe a sigh of relief. What a contrast with the hell they have just left! Here life is calm, the populations peacefully go about their work, and the Japanese control the neutral zone bordering both sides of the Chinese Eastern Railway. Moreover, spring is approaching. The first flowers appear and the air is permeated with an unaccustomed mildness. Their pockets stuffed with roubles, the soldiers spread through the Harbin market and buy everything they find there: cookware, sewing machines, phonographs, cotton goods, silks, jewelry. Surprised by this influx of gold coins, which they take for counterfeit money,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Under the terms of this agreement, the Czechs undertake: 1. to disarm the White formations they may encounter on their route; 2. to maintain a minimum distance between the last Czech trains and the first Red trains; 3. to leave all railway equipment in good condition; 4. to collaborate with the Reds in everything concerning the transport of mail, arms, and certain political agents. This is how Vilensky, the chief of military operations against Hetman Semyonov (who will become Commissar for the whole province of Transbaikalia), and Krasnoshchekov-Tobelsohn, the future president of the Soviet Republic of the Far East, will be transported. (Cf. A. J. Guttmann, Gibel Nikolaievskaia Amure, Berlin, 1924, p. 75.)

2. Its capital, amounting to seventy million crowns, is formed partly by Allied subsidies, partly by deductions made from the fighters’ pay. In exchange, these men became shareholders of the Bank. (See above, p. 73, note 3.)

[[PDF page 086]]

the Chinese merchants first refuse them. The Allied authorities have to post an ordinance forcing them to accept the coins. The result of this measure is quickly felt: while the money-changers’ shops are besieged by groups of soldiers who want at all costs to exchange their gold and roubles for yen and dollars, prices rise vertiginously and the gold rate collapses on the Harbin exchange.

In the first days of March, the Legionaries arrive at Vladivostok. They shout with joy when they see the Sea of Japan spread out on the horizon, which many of them thought they would never reach! Here they are at last at the end of their tribulations. Moored at the quays, steamships are waiting to bring them back to their homes.

Embarkation takes place under the direction of Dr. Rašín. But although the operation has been methodically prepared, the port authorities are taken by surprise by the enormous booty the fighters are bringing with them. The Allies have placed twenty-nine ships at their disposal. This is far from enough. To allow the men and cadres to carry all their baggage, the Legion itself will have to buy a ship—which it will christen the Légia—and the Czech quartermaster service will have to charter twelve additional cargo ships.

It is on this true armada that, in successive batches, 67,819 passengers will embark, including 53,455 soldiers and 3,004 officers. The Roma will weigh anchor first, on the night of 15 January 1919. Other departures will follow at close intervals. On 1 May, an American ship, the President Grant, will put to sea with 5,500 soldiers. There will then remain only 16,000 Legionaries at Vladivostok, who will embark in the following days. The last transport will be made by the first Czechoslovak ship:

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Even before arriving at Vladivostok, the men had received their passports and route papers and had passed a health inspection. (Cf. Dr. R. Rašín, Evakuace, Prague, 1923.)

3. This fleet includes the Roma (Italian); the Madras (English); the Mainau (French); the Sheridan, the Nankin, the Archer, the Heffron (American), to which must be added 12 other American ships, 7 Japanese ships, 1 Chinese ship, and 2 Russian ships. (Cf. Colonel Veyrigné, Avec les Tchécoslovaques, Annex IV, p. 198.)

4. The remainder breaks down as follows: prisoners of war (Czech noncombatants), 6,714; women, 1,716; children, 714; foreign nationals, 2,027; miscellaneous, 189. (Dr. R. Rašín, Evakuace, p. 13-20.)

[[PDF page 087]]

the Légia, purchased by the Legionaries' Bank, which will later maintain Czechoslovakia's connections with the Far East.

The Legionaries are divided into two contingents. The first will return to Bohemia by way of the Indian Ocean, the Suez Canal, Trieste, and Austria. The others will cross the Pacific Ocean and return through Honolulu, Vancouver, and San Francisco, after making a tour of the world.

The "Anabasis" of the Czech Legionaries is over. But accounts of their adventure have preceded them into their country, and they return haloed with a true legend. Forgotten are their about-faces, their indiscipline, and their exactions. Far from reproaching them for these, people now see in them only a testimony to the practical genius of the race. Not only do writers and journalists glorify them, but all political parties weave them crowns, for they need their support.

And it must be recognized that this enthusiasm is justified. For four years the Legions were a flag that the National Committee in Paris proudly brandished, a formidable argument of propaganda that it never ceased to invoke. How could independence be refused to a people whose sons had shown such obstinacy in rejoining their homeland? In this respect—and although they took part in none of the decisive battles of the war—these small groups of men making their way across the immensity of the Asian continent rendered their nation an inestimable service. Their robustness, endurance, and tenacity, joined to the way in which they managed to foil traps and ambushes, demonstrated to the eyes of the world the indomitable character of the Czech people

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. M. Klofáč, leader of the Czech Socialist Party, would write in a Letter to the Legionaries dated 14 June 1919: "You stand immense before the world that admires you because your deeds have become a legend and surpass all the feats accomplished by men from Herodotus down to our own days. What do all the names that fill history manuals weigh beside yours? We are not only proud of you, we love you! You will be the educators and guides of the Nation." (F. V. Krejčí, U Sibirske Armady, Prague, 1922, p. 29-30.)

[[PDF page 088]]

and its capacity to govern itself. That is why Edouard Benes will be right to write: "The action of the Legionaries powerfully contributed to the success of our negotiations... It allowed us to obtain, at the Peace Conference, far more than we could have hoped for at the beginning of the conflict."

1. Edvard Benes, Der Aufstand der Nationen, p. 343 and 345.

[[PDF page 089]]

III
THE WORK OF THE CZECH NATIONAL COUNCIL IN PARIS

While the Legionaries were painfully making their way across Siberia, Masaryk, Benes, Stefanik, and their immediate collaborators did not remain inactive. One is astonished by the magnitude of the task they accomplished at the head of the National Council in Paris. They too had to confront a sea of indifference, incomprehension, and hostile prejudice. But instead of being fifty thousand, they were only a handful...

It is rare in history for such a small group of men to have achieved, in so little time, such great results. No doubt they quickly benefited from Allied support. But even more than to circumstances, their success was due to their intelligence and skill. Everywhere they went, they knew how to rally active sympathies, use them to make themselves heard by the statesmen in office, and finally exert on international policy an influence disproportionate to their real importance. It has been said that they were “the intellectual masters of the Entente” during the First World War and that, without them, the dislocation of the Central Empires would probably not have been pushed to its end. The documents of that period show that this is true. A surprising success when one thinks of the weakness of the means they had at the beginning...

When Masaryk, Benes, Dürich, and a few others came to settle in London and Paris, what exactly did they represent? Almost nothing. They were totally unknown to the Western public. With the exception of Masaryk, none had behind him

[[PDF page 090]]

a political career. They had at their disposal only derisory funds and no press organ. Finally, their name evoked little response among their compatriots, for whom the authentic representatives of the national opposition remained Kramář, Scheiner, Klofáč, and Rašín. As for the Czechs scattered in France, Belgium, and England, what was their legal status? As Austrian citizens, they were considered nationals of an enemy country. Their property was sequestered and their persons subjected to surveillance measures.

The first concern of the Czech representatives abroad consists of dispelling the prejudices of the Allied authorities toward them, having the restrictive measures affecting them lifted, and allowing them to regain freedom of movement and disposal of their property. This initial objective will be reached in stages.

The first country to move in this direction is Russia. Not only does the Petrograd government not consider the Czech and Slovak nationals settled on its territory as enemies, but it allows them to enlist in a volunteer battalion and authorizes them, on 7 March 1915, to constitute a National Union.

Paris did not fail to follow this example. On 14 September 1914, M. Millerand, Minister of War, admitted that a section of Czech volunteers should be formed within the Foreign Legion. Two weeks later (2 October), the Ministry of the Interior granted the Czechs residing in France the same status as

the nationals of Allied nations.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. “I was the only Czech deputy, which annoyed me,” Masaryk writes, “for in the West more importance is attached to a deputy than to a professor. My visiting card read: Prof. T. G. Masaryk, Czech deputy. President of the Czech Progressive Group in the Vienna Parliament.” (La Résurrection d’un État, p. 43.)

2. Since Italy and the United States were still neutral, the Czech colonies there were free, but were nevertheless required to show a certain reserve. The Italian colony was not numerous. But the Czech and Slovak colonies of America formed rich and influential communities, especially in New York, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. They contributed powerfully, through the sending of funds, to the rise of the National Council in Paris.

3. The Union of Czechs of Russia held its first congress in Moscow from 7 to 11 March 1915.

4. “From the beginning of the war, Stefanik, who had French nationality, had insisted to one of his friends, an official of the Paris police, that the Czechs, the Slovaks, and the Slavs in general not be officially considered Austrians and be able to benefit from the advantages granted to citizens of Allied countries.” (Masaryk, op. cit., p. 108.)

[[PDF page 091]]

England was slower to decide. It was only on 19 October 1915, that is to say more than a year after the beginning of hostilities, that M. Asquith took measures of relaxation toward Czechs residing in Great Britain and in the Empire (Canada, Australia, and South Africa). Simultaneously, a Central Union of Czech Associations in Switzerland was formed at Bern, and a Czech National Association of America was founded in the United States. The Czechs of Serbia, Holland, and Italy organized in the same way, so that in less than a year a true network of national groupings was constituted in all the principal neutral or belligerent countries.

But these groups, which arose spontaneously for the defense of their interests, have no cohesion. “All our colonies,” Masaryk writes, “were divided into parties and fractions; each had a particular character according to the country where it lived... There existed no link between them, no recognized chief, no newspaper serving as a central organ, no common program of action. By reason of geography, our Russian colony had several centers: the distance between Petersburg, Moscow, and Kiev was enough to prevent any unity among our compatriots. In America, for the same reason, New York, Chicago, Cleveland, and other cities each formed a world apart.”

Coordinating the activity of all these small groups, rallying them to a common program, and finally placing over them a central organization capable of representing them before the Allied governments: such will be the first task to which Benes and Masaryk devote themselves. It will require more than a year of effort and will lead, on 14 November 1915, to the creation of a Czech National Council in Paris,

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1. No doubt because the Czech colony there is insignificant. If Masaryk decided to settle on the banks of the Thames, it was because he considered England the keystone of the coalition.

3. The Czech National Association of America held its first congress at Cleveland on 13 January 1915.

4. “Everywhere, our compatriots had understood what they had to do,” Masaryk writes. “Everywhere, they had spontaneously undertaken to create political associations and military formations.” (La Résurrection d’un État, p. 56.)

5. Masaryk, op. cit., p. 57, 84-86. The author adds: “It is unnecessary to set out here in detail the conflicts that divided certain colonies. In Russia, the opposition between the conservative and progressive tendencies was more important [than anywhere else]; the revolution of 1917 put the conservatives into the background and thereby unity finally reestablished itself, though imperfectly.” We have already alluded to these divergences in connection with the Dürich affair. (See above, p. 44.)

[[PDF page 092]]

of which Masaryk will assume the presidency and of which Benes will become secretary general. This Council will almost immediately be recognized by the Czech colonies of Switzerland, Holland, England, France, the United States, and South Africa. The presence of Milan Stefanik on the Central Committee and the adherence of Stefan Osusky, during the summer of 1916, will facilitate the rallying of the Slovak colonies of America.

On 20 March 1917, the brigade of Legionaries formed in Russia proclaims “the creation of the Czechoslovak State” and recognizes the National Council of Paris as a provisional government, with Masaryk as “dictator.” On 12 May of the same year, the Kiev Congress creates the Section of the National Council for Russia (Odbocka). This replaces all similar organizations founded at the beginning of the war under the aegis of the Russian government and which had distinguished themselves by their attachment to tsarism. Despite threats of schism and sometimes violent opposition from certain personalities, the pro-Western and democratic tendencies of Masaryk have ended by prevailing.

The “recognition” of the National Council by the Legionaries of Russia and by the various communities of the Czech diaspora represents a first victory, the one that will make all the others possible. It allows Masaryk to present himself to the Allies as the spokesman of his compatriots and gives him a representativeness that he had lacked until now. But it is not enough by itself to secure the realization of Czech and Slovak aspirations. The National Council still has to be “recognized” as such by the Entente governments. That is what Masaryk and

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2. The Slovaks of Hungary will, for their part, continue to recognize M. Shrobar as their leader.

6. Especially Messrs. Dürich, Horsky, and Koníček. In the end, Dürich will be expelled from the National Council.

7. “Here too,” Masaryk writes, “the Russian revolution was of great help to us.” (Op. cit., p. 87.)

[[PDF page 093]]

Benes have been working at since their arrival in London and Paris. And it must be recognized that they discharged this task with an acute sense of propaganda, tireless tenacity, and great diplomatic skill.

“It goes without saying,” Masaryk writes, “that everywhere we tried to enter as soon as possible into

relations with the governments and especially with the foreign ministries; moreover, we had everywhere to establish our liaison with the diplomats of the Entente. But here again, choice and method were necessary... Everywhere, I made the acquaintance of those among the principal officials of the ministries who had influence and knew the situation. Often we were helped by second-rank people, lawyers, bankers, priests, who had friendly access to statesmen and leading politicians." All these efforts were powerfully supported by Masonic and Jewish circles, which explains their rapid diffusion in international opinion.

1. "We won the foreign newspapers to our cause," Masaryk writes, "through discussions with their editors and owners, and through contributions: I myself wrote many articles. The interview was also a useful means. Everywhere we created press bureaus to maintain relations with newspapers and agencies and spread our information. I will cite in particular the Czech Press Bureau, created in England at the end of 1916, and the Slav Press Bureau, founded in America in the spring of 1917." (Op. cit., p. 93.) To these agencies, directly dependent on the National Council, should be added Ernest Denis's La Nation tchèque, Le Monde slave, Seton-Watson's The New Europe, Colonel Feyler's articles in the Revue militaire suisse, the Journal de Genève, Jules Sauerwein's articles in Le Matin, Wickham Steed's in The Times, etc.

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2. Masaryk, La Résurrection d'un État, p. 91-92. Among the leading personalities who gave valuable help to the cause of Czech independence, Masaryk cites in France: M. Pichon, Minister of Foreign Affairs; M. Deschanel, President of the Chamber; M. Leygues, President of the Foreign Affairs Committee; M. Philippe Berthelot, Secretary General of the Quai d'Orsay; Mme Boas de Jouvenel; Mme Louise Weiss; Messrs. Gauvain, Fournol, de Quirielle, Boutroux, Chéradame, etc. In England: M. Kerr, Lloyd George's secretary; Sir Samuel Hoare; M. Whyte, friend of M. Seton-Watson; Lord Northcliffe; M. Garvin of the Observer; Dr. Dillon; M. Harold Williams; M. Hyndman; M. Charles Sarolea, etc. In the United States: M. Lansing, M. Lodge, Colonel House, Professor Herron, etc.

3. The Freemasons were the declared enemies of Austrian clericalism and willingly took up Voltaire's formula against it: "Crush the infamous thing!" "As for the Jews," Masaryk tells us, "they had not forgotten the Hilsner affair, nor other things besides." (Op. cit., p. 94.) Let us recall that in 1899 Masaryk had undertaken a press campaign on behalf of the Jew Hilsner, accused of the murder of a Christian woman, and had vigorously opposed the legend of ritual murder. "As everywhere," he writes, "I had in America the support of the Jews... Among these I will name M. Brandeis, Justice of the Supreme Court, originally from Bohemia. He knew President Wilson well and had his confidence. In New York, one of the Zionist leaders was M. Mack. I also made the personal acquaintance of M. Sokolov, an influential leader of Zionism. In America, as in Europe, the Jews have great influence in the press: it was very precious to us not to have this great power against us." (La Résurrection d'un État, p. 244.)

[[PDF page 094]]

But despite all this assistance—interested or voluntary—the task that the leaders of the National Council have assigned themselves remains arduous. To succeed, their activity must be exercised simultaneously on two levels: 1. to induce the leaders of the Entente to ratify the aspirations to freedom of the Czech and Slovak peoples; 2. to convince them that this objective can be reached only through the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

It is this second aspect of their activity that requires the greatest efforts on their part, for in Paris as in

London there exists—at least until the end of 1917—a strong Austrophile and Magyarophile tendency. “We had to fight the decisive battle against it,” Masaryk writes, “for the Austrian prejudice, in Europe and in America, could not be overcome at one blow.” At that time, indeed, an entire part of opinion was reluctant to envisage so radical an upheaval and considered that the maintenance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire offered a double guarantee against the expansion of Germany and the Balkanization of Central Europe. Hence the necessity, for the Czech leaders, of combating these views without respite. And since time is needed to allow their theses to mature in men’s minds, they want a long war —whatever the cost.

That is why one of Masaryk’s first public acts consists of publishing an anti-Austrian Manifesto (14 November 1915), in which he proclaims that “the Czech people are in open war against the Habsburg Monarchy and will lay down arms only when it has ceased to exist.” That is also why nothing alarms the leaders of the National Council more than the attempts at a separate peace undertaken by Emperor Charles in March 1917. If these negotiations succeed, they will shorten the duration of the conflict and spare the lives of thousands of combatants. But will they not at the same time prevent the dismantling of Austria?

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2. “It was above all important to make the Allies understand that the dismantling of the Habsburg Empire was the principal aim of the world war,” Masaryk writes. “But that required time. I long feared that a short war would not leave us sufficient time to achieve it.”

3. At the same time, Benes published with Delagrave, in Paris, a work entitled: Destroy Austria-Hungary! The Martyrdom of Czechoslovakia Through the Centuries.

[[PDF page 095]]

“Given this situation,” writes Jaroslav Papoušek, Masaryk’s personal secretary, “one of the capital duties of Czechoslovak action abroad was to paralyze these attempts at a separate peace, by revealing in detail to Western public opinion the duplicity of the Habsburg Empire... This was not an easy or attractive task. It consisted in ruining all hope of a near end to the sufferings of the war. It risked making the Czechs appear desirous of prolonging the world catastrophe for their own special aims, legitimate certainly, but too particular. If one considers, moreover, that the destruction of Austria-Hungary, at which the Czechoslovaks were working, seemed an enterprise beyond the strength of the Allies, one will have an idea of the task assumed by the National Council. It carried it out with the necessary reflection and calm.”

As can be seen, the leaders of the National Council showed no less obstinacy in pursuing their political goals than the Czech Legionaries in their retreat across Siberia. If one thinks that they helped create an atmosphere favorable to the outbreak of the first Russian revolution; that they worked to make Emperor Charles’s attempts at a separate peace fail; that they accelerated the consolidation of the Bolshevik regime in Russia; and that they persuaded Wilson to include among his war aims the establishment of an independent Czechoslovak Republic, one will better measure the influence—visible or occult—that they exerted on the course of the First World War, and one will not find at all exaggerated the assertion that “it is rare, in history, to see so small a group of men obtain, in so little time, such great results.”

1. The first letter of Emperor Charles, addressed on 24 March 1917 to his brother-in-law, Prince Sixtus of Bourbon-Parma, naturally took for granted the maintenance of the territorial integrity of the Monarchy. Later (15-20 December 1917), new conversations had taken place in Geneva, at Lloyd

George's instigation, between Count Mensdorff and M. Smuts, to whom the British Prime Minister had attached his secretary Philip Kerr, the future Lord Lothian.

Smuts had declared to Mensdorff "that English opinion was not yet ripe for an exchange of views with Germany, but that the Foreign Office would all the more willingly open talks with Austria-Hungary, whose destruction no Englishman desired. On the contrary: on the banks of the Thames, people readily thought of an enlargement of the Habsburg Empire, for the collapse of Russia had broken the balance in Central and Eastern Europe to Germany's advantage to such an extent that only a powerful Austria seemed capable of counterbalancing her." (Glaise-Horstenau, Die Katastrophe, p. 159 ff.)

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2. The argument advanced by the Czechs to discredit Emperor Charles will be the following: "How can the slightest confidence be placed in a sovereign capable of so ignominiously betraying his best ally [that is, Germany]?"

[[PDF page 096]]

But let us not anticipate events.

The first success Masaryk wins in the field of international diplomacy occurs on 3 February 1916, the date on which Aristide Briand, President of the Council, receives him in audience at the Quai d'Orsay. "I presented M. Briand with a map of Europe," Masaryk recounts, "and set out for him my view of the war, showing that the condition of a reconstruction of Europe and of a true weakening of Germany was the dismantling of Austria into its various natural and historical parts. I was very brief and limited myself, so to speak, to a few formulas. M. Briand, who is a good French brain, immediately saw clearly into the matter; he accepted our plan and promised to apply it." This position—the first of its kind—causes a true sensation in all European chancelleries.

At the same time, Stefanik multiplies his approaches to the services of the rue Saint-Dominique, to obtain the creation of combat units composed of Czech and Slovak volunteers. During the months that follow, a series of conventions and decrees are signed to this effect. They lead, on 19 December 1917, to an order under which the French government undertakes to take charge of all the Czechoslovak Legions.

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1. This interview had been carefully prepared by Stefanik and by Philippe Berthelot.

3. "This presentation carried weight not only in Paris, but also in the other Allied countries," Masaryk emphasizes. "I do not exaggerate in saying that our plan for dismantling Austria supplied the Entente with a positive program. It was not enough to defeat the Central Empires... It was necessary to reorganize Central Europe, and even all Europe. My interview with M. Briand made an impression in London and strengthened our position there... We knew how to make such a great success count in all the newspapers." (Op. cit., p. 103-104.)

4. May-June-July 1916: France agrees in principle to the creation of an autonomous Czechoslovak Army in France and charges Stefanik with negotiating, in agreement with General Janin, the question of transporting Czechoslovak volunteers from Russia to France. 13 June 1917: Convention between M. Albert Thomas, Minister of Armaments, and Professor Masaryk for the sending to France of 30,000 Czech prisoners interned in Russia. (This is the first treaty concluded by a State with the National

Council.) 17 August: First agreement of the National Council with the French government concerning the creation of a Czechoslovak Army in France. 19 December: Preliminary decree on the creation of the Czechoslovak Army in France. 7 February 1918: Benes-Clemenceau convention on the creation of the Czechoslovak Army in France, etc.

[[PDF page 097]]

England follows the movement with some delay, but it follows it nevertheless. On 19 October 1915, King George V addressed a telegram to Professor Masaryk in which he affirmed “his ardent sympathies for the national aspirations of the Czech people.” The terms of this message are still measured, and one searches in vain in it for the name of the Slovaks. But during the year 1916 Anglo-Czech friendship strengthens so much that when, on 21 December, President Wilson sends a questionnaire to the Allies “to inquire into the peace conditions of the Entente States,” Rome, London, and Paris answer by common accord “that one of their principal conditions is the liberation of the Italians, Slavs, Romanians, and Czechoslovaks from foreign domination” (10 January 1917).

“This answer,” Masaryk writes—he learned of it during one of his journeys in Russia—“made a great effect in all our colonies and further strengthened our position. What made the greatest effect was to see us, we Czechs and Slovaks, expressly named in it...” Yet their name very nearly did not appear there. Only M. Benes’s repeated interventions succeeded in averting this danger. “From reading the text,” Masaryk continues, “I concluded that the word Czechoslovak had been added to a sentence already prepared, which demanded, in general form, the liberation of the Slavs. This fact was later confirmed to me. M. Benes had succeeded in obtaining information on the answer the Allies were preparing. He had immediately entered into talks with M. Berthelot and other persons, but had encountered fairly great difficulties, for the Allies were still hesitating to destroy Austria-Hungary entirely.

[Footnote continuation retained from OCR:] Czech prisoners interned in Russia. (This is the first treaty concluded by a State with the National Council.) 17 August: First agreement of the National Council with the French government concerning the creation of a Czechoslovak Army in France. 19 December: Preliminary decree on the creation of the Czechoslovak Army in France. 7 February 1918: Benes-Clemenceau convention on the creation of the Czechoslovak Army in France, etc.

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1. By virtue of these provisions, the Czech Army, while forming part of an Allied army, remains autonomous in the sense that, politically, it is subject only to the National Council. (Cf. Masaryk, op. cit., p. 286.)

2. Thanks to the combined efforts of M. Asquith, Lord Northcliffe, M. Philip Kerr, Lloyd George’s secretary, and M. Balfour, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

[[PDF page 098]]

“To promise their liberation firmly to the small nations. Verbally and through memoranda, M. Benes had insisted that this promise be made, in order to encourage the revolt of the oppressed nations, and he had asked in particular that the Czechs and Slovaks be expressly named. He had won influential personalities to this idea (especially M. Leygues, President of the Foreign Affairs Committee) and had also obtained that MM. Tardieu and Sauerwein publish, on 3 January, two articles in Le Temps and Le Matin recalling the promises M. Briand had made to me the previous year... Finally, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs gave M. Benes satisfaction.”

The alarm had been serious. But everything ended well. As for the word “Czechoslovak”—which thus appears for the first time in an official document—it has its own history. “Three terms had been proposed,” Masaryk tells us: “liberation of Bohemia, of the Czech Nation, and of the Czechoslovaks. The last was adopted following a conference between Benes, Stefanik, and Osusky.”

On 6 April 1917, the United States enters the war against the Central Empires. Its intervention alongside the Allies marks a decisive turning point in the course of hostilities. Until then, doubts could be entertained about the outcome of the conflict. From now on, it seems impossible that Germany and Austria-Hungary can emerge victorious from it.

At a stroke, the Czech and Slovak colonies residing in the United States can lay aside the reserve imposed on them by American neutrality and support much more vigorously the cause of their compatriots. A not insignificant advantage for Benes and Masaryk. But it is above all from 1918 onward that events accelerate and the National Council begins to reap the fruit of its efforts.

From 9 to 12 April there is held in Rome a “Congress of the Oppressed Peoples of Austria-Hungary.” Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Romanians, Poles from Galicia,

[[PDF page 099]]

Czechs, and Slovaks are encountered there. All demand recognition of their independence and swear not to cease fighting before obtaining it. A fortnight later, that is, on 21 April, the Italian government signs with the representatives of the National Council an agreement concerning the formation of a Czechoslovak army in Italy. On 22 May, Clemenceau promises Benes that “when the moment comes, France will recognize the right of the Czechoslovak nation to independence.” The same day, Lord Robert Cecil makes a similar declaration in the name of the British government.

The day after next, 24 May, during a solemn ceremony, Stefanik presents their flags to the first units of the Czechoslovak army being formed in Italy. On this occasion, M. Orlando, President of the Italian Council, Prince Colonna, mayor of Rome, and M. Page, United States ambassador, give speeches in which they exhort the Czech Legionaries “to fight to the end for the liberation of their homeland.”

After so many months of uncertainty, hesitation, and anguish, optimism reigns in the Allied camp. The failure of Ludendorff’s offensives in the spring of 1918, the accelerated arrival of American reinforcements, the symptomatic cracking sounds heard in the camp of the Central Empires—all announce that the war will soon be over. This prospect induces the Czech leaders to redouble their efforts to obtain explicit recognition from the Allies and to solidly establish their international position before peace talks open.

On 3 June, at Masaryk’s insistence, the British government declares “that it is disposed to recognize the National Council as the directing organ of the Czechoslovak movement as well as of the army fighting alongside the Entente.” Meanwhile, Benes uses every lever to obtain from the French government an even more categorical position. Agreement is reached during the first fortnight of June on the content of the declaration as well as on

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2. Orlando-Stefanik Agreement. It will be completed and enlarged by a second agreement dated 30 June 1918.

3. Its strength grows rapidly thanks to deserters who cross the Austrian front. As in Russia, entire companies abandon the Austro-Hungarian Army to range themselves in the Entente camp.

[[PDF page 100]]

the circumstances in which it will be made public. The date chosen is 29 June 1918. On that day, on the occasion of the presentation of the flag of the 21st Czechoslovak Chasseurs Regiment, M. Pichon, Minister of Foreign Affairs, addresses to M. Benes a letter that does not confine itself to recognizing the National Council “as the supreme manager of all the interests of the nation”... It further declares that it is “the basis of the future Czechoslovak Government” and promises “that the French government will work to make the aspirations of the Czechoslovak people to independence within its historical frontiers prevail.” The next day, 30 June, Messrs. Poincaré, Pichon, Leygues, and Lebrun attend a solemn review, during which the President of the Republic gives a major speech in which he justifies France’s decision from both the historical and political points of view.

“When one reads this document attentively,” writes Jaroslav Papoušek, “one can say that 29 June was the day of the Czechoslovak triumph. The decisive word pronounced that day by France, touching the fate of our people, was of such a character that one could rightly expect the other Allied Powers to make analogous declarations.”

This is indeed what happens. The same day in London, M. Balfour notes M. Pichon’s declaration by telegram; in Rome, Orlando signs a second military convention with Stefanik and declares in Parliament that this “agreement is equivalent to recognition of the Czechoslovak National Council as a de facto government.” On 2 July, M. Lansing, American Secretary of State, affirms “that all members of the Slavic race must be entirely liberated from the Austro-Hungarian yoke.”

These various declarations confer on the National Council an authority it did not previously possess. But one point remains fragile in the edifice that Masaryk and Benes are building:

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1. Jaroslav Papoušek, La Lutte pour l’indépendance du peuple tchécoslovaque, p. 76. This promise will be renewed and confirmed on 23 September by a Convention under whose terms the French government “commits itself in favor of the creation of a Czechoslovak State within its historical frontiers.”

[[PDF page 101]]

these are their relations with the Slovaks and Ruthenians, whom they intend to incorporate into their new State.

Since the populations themselves are still included in Hungary (where no member of the National Council in Paris can venture without being arrested), Masaryk leaves for the United States in order to conclude agreements with the chiefs of the Slovak and Ruthenian colonies of America.

“Those of the Slovak leaders who reflected,” Masaryk writes, “understood that they would get nothing from simple territorial autonomy and saw clearly that an isolated action by the Slovaks for independence would end in a fiasco... I had been able to show the Slovaks how unknown they were to the political world and to what failure separate action would lead us. There could be no serious

question of an independent Slovakia; the only possibility would have been to obtain Slovak autonomy within the framework of Hungary. But in the given circumstances, even that was impossible. There remained only Czechoslovak unity."

Gathered in conference at Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania), Masaryk and the chiefs of Slovak emigration examine the way in which this union might be realized. Before committing themselves further, they ask Masaryk to promise them that the new State will respect their autonomy, their language, and their ethnic personality. To reassure them, Masaryk invokes his pro-Slovak sentiments. He emphasizes the prestige enjoyed by the National Committee in Paris, compared with their powerlessness and obscurity, points out the promises he has received from the Allies, and affirms to them that the new State will be endowed with a federal structure. As members of the Federation, the Slovaks will have their own Diet, their schools, and their courts. No one will dispute their use of their language or the right to administer themselves.

On these bases, an agreement is signed at Pittsburgh on 30 May.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. In Masaryk's mind, Hungary must be dismantled in the same way as Austria.

3. "The Slovaks and the Czechs knew that I had always been for Slovakia. Slovak by my origins and traditions, it is as a Slovak that I think, and not only have I always been an ardent friend of Slovakia, but I have never ceased to work for it." (Op. cit., p. 238.)

[[PDF page 102]]

"I signed this Agreement without hesitation," Masaryk would later declare, "for it was only a local convention between Czechs and Slovaks of America. The signatories were all, with the exception of two, American citizens..." The final paragraph of the agreement specifies, moreover, "that the practical details of the union will be fixed later by the legal representatives of the Slovak people."

Parallel to these negotiations, Masaryk uses his stay in the United States to tighten contacts with M. Zatkovič, spokesman of the Ruthenian emigration. But unlike the Slovaks, who have only one alternative—to remain under the Magyar yoke or to join the Czechs—the Ruthenians, who do not form by themselves a complete entity but are a fragment of the Ukrainian people, see several solutions open to them: to associate themselves with Czechoslovakia, to attach themselves to Bukovina and eastern Galicia, or else to return to Ukraine proper, if the latter obtains the status of an independent State. Their delegates therefore show themselves more demanding than the Slovaks on the matter of autonomy. They agree to rally to Czechoslovakia only if no other path is open to them. Moreover, they consider that any agreement on this subject can be final only when it has been ratified by the populations themselves.

Masaryk, who needs their support, points out to them that a sure solution is better than hazardous hypotheses. He doubts strongly that Ukraine will obtain its independence. Berthelot has warned him that western Galicia will go to Poland and Bukovina to Romania. He therefore undertakes, toward the Ruthenians, the most formal commitments concerning their Diet, their schools, and the right to administer themselves. Having succeeded in dispelling the reservations of his interlocutors, he finally concludes with them the Treaty of Homestead (27 July 1918).

If, for the Slovaks, the Pittsburgh Agreement corresponds to a vital necessity, for the Ruthenians that of

Homestead is

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2. An implacable struggle is engaged on this subject between Kiev and Moscow. But Masaryk, who has recently been in Ukraine, does not believe that the Ukrainians can in the long run prevail over the successive assaults of the Red Armies and Piłsudski's Legions.

[[PDF page 103]]

in sum only a makeshift. But whatever the intrinsic value of these pacts, their signature nevertheless represents a great success for Masaryk. Henceforth, he can present himself to the Entente leaders as the common spokesman of the Czechs, Slovaks, and Ruthenians.

On his return to Europe, he relies on this argument to make the National Council take one more step, passing from de facto recognition to de jure recognition. This time, England takes the lead. On 9 August, M. Balfour publishes the following declaration in the name of the British government:

Since the beginning of the war, the Czechoslovak Nation has opposed the common enemy by every means in its power. The Czechoslovaks have created an important army, which is fighting on three fronts and which is striving to contain the German invasion in Russia and Siberia.

Taking into account the scale of this effort to obtain independence, Great Britain regards the Czechoslovaks as an Allied Nation and recognizes the whole of the three Czechoslovak armies as an Allied and belligerent army, in a regular state of war against Austria-Hungary and Germany.

Great Britain also recognizes the rights of the National Council which, as trustee of the future Czechoslovak Government, possesses supreme power over this Allied and belligerent army.

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1. This is not entirely accurate. Since the Battle of Zborov (June 1917), the Czech Legionaries of Russia have no longer crossed swords with the Austrians or Germans. Moreover, no German army has ever advanced into Siberia. The Czechs who are there fight alternately against the Bolsheviks and the White Russians. But no one in the West is aware of this situation. Czech propaganda therefore has every latitude to present events in the most favorable light.

3. The work accomplished by Stefanik on the military level is as impressive as that of Benes on the diplomatic level. In August 1918, the National Council effectively has three armies, distributed as follows:
Russian Army: 92,000 men
French Army: 12,000 men
Italian Army: 24,000 men
Total: 128,000 men
To this number of combatants, Masaryk tells us, will be added 54,000 soldiers of the so-called territorial detachments formed in Italy in December 1918, which will bring the strength of the Czechoslovak forces to 182,000 men. (La Résurrection d'un État, p. 289.)

The figures indicated by Masaryk for the armies of France and Italy, as well as for the territorial detachments, correspond to reality. On the other hand, the strength attributed to the Army of Russia seems a little "inflated" (even adding the losses, estimated at 3,400 men). It does not seem that they

ever exceeded 60,000 men, if one relies on the statistics of repatriated Legionaries. (See above, p. 182.)

[[PDF page 104]]

On 2 September, a Wilson-Lansing declaration confirms the English position. It recognizes the National Council as “a belligerent Power, at war with the Central Empires.”

Then Masaryk decides to take the decisive step. Before leaving again for the United States, he transforms the National Council into the “Czechoslovak Provisional Government in Paris” (26 September). As president of this new organization, he appoints Benes Minister of Foreign Affairs and Stefanik Minister of War. On 14 October, Benes, acting by virtue of his new functions, notifies this decision to all Allied heads of state and accredits diplomatic representatives to them.

The next day, 15 October, the French government recognizes de jure the Czechoslovak Provisional Government. England does the same. During the days that follow, telegrams of congratulations and acts of recognition flow into the little private mansion at 18 rue Bonaparte, where the Provisional Government has established its headquarters. Serbia, Poland, Italy, Greece, Belgium, Portugal, Brazil, and Japan recognize the new government one after another.

Meanwhile, a series of events of first importance has transformed the face of the continent from top to bottom. On 4 November, Austria-Hungary has laid down arms. On the 9th, Wilhelm II has abdicated. The same day, revolution has broken out at Kiel. On the 11th, the armistice has been signed on the western front.

The First World War is over. The Allies are victorious. But at the hour when the guns fall silent and a long cry of joy spreads through the towns and countryside of the victorious countries, there rises in Central Europe the rumbling of unleashed crowds, for the revolution born at Kiel has spread to Hamburg, Dresden, Berlin, Munich, Budapest, and Vienna...

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. M. Balfour had prepared this decision by his declaration of 1 October.

[[PDF page 105]]

Masaryk returns to France on 7 December, a few days before President Wilson lands there. His first gesture is to go thank those who have helped him most effectively: Poincaré, Clemenceau, Briand, Pichon, Philippe Berthelot, Jules Cambon, M. and Mme Henri de Jouvenel, and others still. What a road he has traveled since his arrival on the banks of the Seine! In September 1915, he and his friends represented only a handful of obscure émigrés, obliged to wait in ministry antechambers, beg for audiences, and solicit support. Now he and Benes are received as triumphant men. They are the ones being solicited and surrounded with consideration, for their authority in the Inter-Allied Councils is known. It remains for him now only to return to Prague, where the National Assembly has just proclaimed him Head of State (14 November 1918).

His return takes place through Italy. On 15 December, Masaryk arrives at Padua, where he is received by Victor Emmanuel with the honors due to a sovereign. In the days that follow, still in the presence of the King, he reviews the cavalrymen and infantrymen of the two Czech divisions assembled in Venetia, who have already sworn oath to the new Republic. It is on Italian territory that his exile began; it is there that it is going to end. On 17 December, at 3 p.m., he leaves Italy, accompanied by a first

detachment of Legionaries placed under the command of General Piccione.

In the train that brings him back to his country by Udine and Villach, Masaryk cannot help thinking of the intense activity he has deployed with his collaborators over the four years that have just elapsed.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. On 4 November, Benes was invited to participate, on an equal footing with the other belligerents, in the Conference of the Supreme Council assembled to set the armistice conditions. On this occasion, the Czech delegation wished to oppose the cessation of hostilities. It would have liked the Allied armies to penetrate Germany as far as the Rhine, “to make the enemy better feel the whole weight of his defeat.” This intransigent attitude was approved by Lloyd George and Clemenceau. Marshal Foch had to throw all his authority into the scales to have the armistice adopted, declaring: “Since the Germans accept our conditions, it would be criminal to prolong—even by a single day—the effusion of blood.”

2. On 15 November, the forward echelons of the French and English military missions were sent to Prague. On 14 November, a first transport of Legionaries took place from Italy to Czechoslovakia. As for General Piccione, he is going to command for several months the Czech divisions charged with maintaining order in southern Slovakia.

[[PDF page 106]]

“No account, however faithful,” he writes in his Memoirs, “could convey the constant work of our minds, the nervous tension and the emotions at the price of which we had won our political success. What wanderings across the entire world! What approaches in the various ministries, in Paris, London, Rome, Petrograd, Washington, and Tokyo! What visits to the most diverse influential personalities! What memoranda, telegrams, letters, interventions on our behalf from Allied diplomats and our political friends! What interviews, conferences, and articles! But without our propaganda abroad, our diplomatic work, and the blood of our Legions, we would never have conquered freedom.”

On 20 December, at nightfall, the train arrives at Oberhaid, on the frontier of Bohemia. Then, overwhelmed by emotion, Masaryk and the members of his escort step down from their wagon and, weeping, kiss the soil of their recovered homeland.

[[PDF page 107]]

IV
FROM INTERNAL RESISTANCE TO THE PROCLAMATION OF THE REPUBLIC

In what condition will they find Prague after more than four years of absence?

The country has changed greatly since their departure abroad. As we have seen, martial law was proclaimed there. All men over twenty were mobilized. A few summary executions quickly brought back into line those who thought they could engage in subversive activities. No doubt M. Kramář, the leader of the Czech Socialists, founded a “National Committee” (Narodny Vybor). No doubt other opposition leaders, such as Messrs. Rašín, Klofáč, Švehla, and Scheiner, the head of the “Sokols,” tried to unleash an insurrectionary movement. But they were quickly arrested and thrown into prison. The Sokols were dissolved. The 28th and 36th Infantry Regiments, formed mostly of young men recruited from the Slavic districts, were broken up and their personnel distributed among other, “safer,” units. In short, a leaden cover fell over the country.

Yet the population as a whole remained loyal to the Habsburgs. It showed no hostility toward them, quite the contrary. During the years 1915 and 1916, declarations of loyalism never ceased to pour into the Hofburg. Certainly, most of these messages continued to wish for "a restoration of the Historical Rights of Bohemia." But this eventuality was evoked only as a distant prospect, to be realized after the victory of the Central Empires. When, on 2 December 1915, the sixty-seventh anniversary of Franz Joseph's accession was celebrated, all the mayors of the Czech communes,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Especially Kratochvil, executed at Přerov on 23 November 1914, and Matejka, executed on the following 15 December.

[[PDF page 108]]

grouped around the mayor of Prague, sent him their congratulations. As for Dr. Šmeral, socialist deputy in the Reichsrat and head of the future Czechoslovak Communist Party, he addressed to the Emperor, in the name of all Czech workers, "his most ardent wishes for the victory of his arms."

The loyalist attitude of the population is a cruel disappointment for the members of the National Council in Paris, who never cease to affirm at Downing Street and the Quai d'Orsay "that ninety-five percent of the Czechs have only one desire: to break the hateful bonds that attach them to the Habsburgs." Are the Allies not going to interpret this silence as a repudiation? "The absence of reaction on the part of our compatriots and the little echo that our revolutionary propaganda aroused among them were very hard blows for us," Benes will later admit.

But little by little the atmosphere changes under the pressure of events. While the prospect of a rapid victory by the Central Empires fades on the horizon, testimonies of loyalism grow rarer, or are expressed with greater reticence. Acts of sabotage begin to be recorded. At the front, desertions become more numerous each day. All these signs indicate that the wind is turning.

In October 1916, Count Stürgkh, President of the Council, is assassinated in Vienna by Friedrich Adler, one of the members of the Austrian Social Democratic Party. Four weeks later (21 November), Emperor Franz Joseph in turn expires, worn out by the griefs, disappointments, and bereavements of a reign of sixty-eight years. His great-nephew, Archduke Charles, succeeds him on the throne. A new chapter opens in the history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. No one yet knows that it will be the last...

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The son of Victor Adler, President of Austrian Social Democracy. (See vol. IV, p. 382.) Friedrich Adler will reappear on the political stage in October 1918, the date on which he will become, with Otto Bauer returned from Russia, the leader of the left wing of the Austrian Social Democratic Party.

[[PDF page 109]]

Emperor Charles is one of those gentle, generous men, full of good will, who generally preside over the twilight of dynasties. He is entirely disposed to grant broader autonomy to the "Crown Lands" and would willingly make his own the policy that Archduke Franz Ferdinand would no doubt have applied had he not been assassinated at Sarajevo. But will his will be equal to the circumstances? Will he know how to thwart the conjunction of forces—internal and external—that are working to dislocate the Dual Monarchy?

His first gesture upon acceding to the throne is to promulgate a general amnesty and free all the opposition leaders imprisoned by Franz Joseph, especially Kramář, Klofáč, Scheiner, and Rašín. In acting thus, he hopes to demonstrate his desire for cooperation. But his act of clemency—which public opinion interprets as an admission of weakness—has the opposite effect from that which he expected. When Kramář returns to Prague, his arrival unleashes an explosion of enthusiasm. Barely out of their prisons, the opposition leaders begin their agitation again. The first Russian revolution, which has just dethroned the Tsar, gives them more than encouragement: an example.

The National Committee is reconstituted and the Maffia resumes its clandestine activity. At a stroke, growing effervescence appears in the country. From November 1916 onward, the Czech deputies of the Reichsrat have decided to regroup to give greater weight to their demands. Six months later (May 1917), Czech-language writers assemble in their turn. They draft a manifesto in which they ask the deputies of the Reichsrat to demand with greater vigor the restoration of their country's "Historical Rights." On 14 May, a declaration by the metalworkers announces that the hour of resignation and passivity is over. Finally, on 27 May, at the reopening of

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. It is through it that Czech opinion will learn successively of the formation of the Legions fighting abroad, the creation of an autonomous army in Russia, and the progressive integration of Czech divisions into the forces of the Entente.

2. Thus was born the Cesky Svaz, or "Czech bloc," formed from all the Czech deputies in the Vienna Reichsrat.

[[PDF page 110]]

the Austrian Parliament, which Emperor Charles has convened for purposes of appeasement, the Czech deputies vote a very violent motion in which they reaffirm their desire to see Bohemia granted the right to administer itself.

Meanwhile, the social situation continues to worsen. The cost of living rises; foodstuffs become scarce. Strikes succeed one another, provoked by demands for wage readjustments. Acts of sabotage multiply in factories working for national defense. The appeals of Benes and Masaryk begin to be heard.

Slowly but surely, the forces working to dislocate the Empire become bolder and gain ground. Antagonisms grow sharper. On 6 January 1918, Epiphany Day, the Czech deputies of the Reichsrat publish a new manifesto that will enter history under the name "Declaration of the Three Kings." In it they imperatively demand the restoration of the old Kingdom of Bohemia and its erection into a sovereign State.

At once, the Germans become anxious. If Emperor Charles gave effect to this demand, would three and a half million of their people not be included within the frontiers of that State? Resolved to oppose this at any cost, the German deputies of Bohemia meet under the presidency of M. Raphael Pacher. Speaking in the name of the forty-six electoral districts they represent, they ask "that the Germanic districts of Bohemia be erected into an autonomous German province, distinct from the Czech districts and enjoying all the prerogatives of a Crown Land." Almost at the same time, in the speech he gives on 8 February 1918 before the American Congress, President Wilson affirms that "all well-defined national aspirations must receive the fullest possible satisfaction, without perpetuating old elements of

discord or introducing new antagonisms likely, with time, to break the peace of Europe and, consequently, of the world." By virtue of this principle, he states a program in fourteen points, the tenth of which specifies:

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The Reichsrat, elected in 1911, had not sat since August 1914.

2. This demand reproduces almost exactly the motion adopted on 31 August 1848 by the representatives of the German towns of Bohemia gathered in Congress at Teplitz-Schönau. (See above, p. 16.) It also echoes the wish presented on 19 October 1848 to the Frankfurt Parliament by the delegates of German Bohemia: "When a German country and a non-German country have the same sovereign, the German country must receive a Constitution separating it from the non-German country."

[[PDF page 111]]

"To the peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to safeguard, must be given, as soon as possible, the broadest possibilities of autonomous development."

Then the Imperial Cabinet understands that it is time to do something. Emerging from its too-long inertia, it decides to give satisfaction to this double aspiration for autonomy formulated by both Czechs and Germans. The thing is all the more feasible because, with the exception of a few Germanic enclaves scattered in Slavic territory, the two communities form ethnic entities easy to delimit. On 21 May 1918, Emperor Charles promulgates an Ordinance under which Germans and Czechs will be granted the right to administer themselves. To this end, the Germanic districts will be separated from the Slavic districts by a line of demarcation that follows the linguistic frontier as closely as possible. Five of them—Trautenau, Reichenberg, Leitmeritz, Eger, and Budweis—will go to the Germans. The seven others—Prague, Pilsen, Písek, Tábor, Časlau, Königgrätz, and Jičín—will go to the Czechs. Count Coudenhove, who has succeeded Prince Thun-Hohenstein as Statthalter in Bohemia, receives the order to begin at once the study of the modalities for executing this plan, which is to come into force in the spring of 1919.

The German deputies of Bohemia declare themselves satisfied with this settlement. Meeting under the presidency of Dr. Titta, they decide to prepare a Constitution for the five districts called to form the future "German Bohemia." Nor do the Czechs seem dissatisfied. Under Kramář's impulse, the "Czech National Committee" transforms itself into a "National Council" and prepares to take in hand the administration of the territory that will be allotted to it.

The National Council in Paris is consternated when it learns that another National Council has been constituted in Prague, which does not depend on its authority and can only enter, sooner or later, into rivalry with it.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. It will suffice to rectify a few district boundaries, which do not always correspond to the linguistic frontier. Thus part of the district of Budweis will go to the district of Písek, while the Germanic enclave of Iglau will be attached to the district of Budweis (which will change its name).

2. Besides Kramář, who assumes the presidency, its principal members are Messrs. Rašín, Švehla, Soukup, and Stříbrný.

[[PDF page 112]]

But where its anger overflows is when it learns that the leaders of the internal Resistance have rallied to the views of the Vienna Cabinet. How could they accept this bastard solution, which will make their country a rump State, amputated of its industrial regions and deprived of strategic frontiers, that is to say incapable of defending itself against its powerful neighbors? How could they give up claiming Moravia, where Czech nationals represent half the population? Finally, how could they be content with internal autonomy, when the victory of the Allies—which now seems certain—puts total independence within their reach?

[Map text: Silesia / Moravia / Lower Austria. Separation of the Slavic and German districts of Bohemia, according to the imperial ordinance of 21 May 1918.]

To prevent the application of the Ordinance of 21 May,

[[PDF page 113]]

the National Council in Paris has two means at its disposal: aggravate internal tension as much as possible and have itself recognized as soon as possible by the Entente leaders as the only legal government of the future Czechoslovak State. Its members therefore multiply their approaches in Rome, London, and Paris. A simple comparison of dates is significant in this respect. Emperor Charles's Ordinance is dated 21 May 1918. France's recognition comes on 29 June; Italy's on 3 July; England's on 9 August; America's on 2 September. Henceforth assured of the unconditional support of the Allies, Benes and Masaryk can look to the future with more confidence. They tell themselves—not without reason—that the imprudent concessions made to the Imperial Cabinet by Kramář and his friends will not weigh very heavily before the will of the victors.

While Ludendorff launches his final offensives, the Vienna government decides to proceed with the installation of the new system. Little by little, in the Slavic districts, Czech officials replace non-Czech officials and recognize the authority of the National Council in Prague. In order to counter an evolution that risks consolidating the power of its rival, the National Council in Paris decides to foment disturbances inside the country. Benes's old Maffia immediately enters into action. At the beginning of October, some of its members organize at Písek a putsch intended to overthrow Kramář and his team, considered too docile toward the Habsburgs. Simultaneously, it organizes a monster meeting in Prague where thousands of workers, gathered under the pretext of demanding wage increases, crisscross the city streets shouting: "Převrat! Převrat! Revolution! Revolution!" (14 October). But the military authorities are on their guard. The Písek conspiracy is smothered in the egg, while two regiments, one composed of Hungarian soldiers, the other of German recruits from the Egerland, open fire on the crowd and quickly disperse it. Five dead and a hundred wounded are counted.

[[PDF page 114]]

But twenty-four hours later, order is restored.

This demonstration of force gives Kramář and his collaborators much to reflect on. Those who conduct their action from abroad are free to want to plunge the country into bloody chaos. Those who live, day after day, amid the populations, are bound to show more caution...

But if the Central Empires are still capable of imposing their will in Bohemia, they can no longer do so on the western front, where their armies are retreating from the Vosges to the sea.

On 16 October, sensing the coming debacle, Emperor Charles publishes a manifesto in which he announces his intention to give the Austro-Hungarian Empire a federal structure. This rescript, written by Dr. Lammasch, provides for recognition of the right of peoples to self-determination, but specifies "that no infringement will be made on the integrity of the Crown." The deputies of the Reichsrat are invited to form, according to their ethnic affinities, "National Councils" in order to draft a new Constitution.

Nine days earlier, Count Andrassy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, had informed President Wilson, through the intermediary of the Vatican, that Austria-Hungary was disposed to open peace talks on the basis of the fourteen points, as he had stated them in his speech to the American Congress on 8 February 1918.

"After all," people say in the Emperor's entourage, "Wilson's proposals are not unreasonable. They may allow Austria-Hungary to get out of it at the lowest cost. Among the fourteen points, only points 9, 10, 11, and 13 concern it directly. That the parts of Trentino inhabited by Italians should return to Italy (point 9) is quite natural. (Trieste can receive a special status, in accordance with the wishes of its population.) That the portion of western Galicia occupied for centuries by unquestionably Polish populations

[[PDF page 115]]

should return to Poland (point 11) is equally normal. Austria already agreed to this in 1916, when it undertook, jointly with Germany, to constitute an independent Polish State after the end of hostilities. (A "Kingdom of Halicz" could be constituted in eastern Galicia, inhabited mostly by Ruthenians, that is to say Ukrainians.) That Serbia and Romania should be evacuated (as point 13 requires) is already almost accomplished. There remains only point 10, which concerns the territories situated at the heart of the Empire: Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary. What does the President of the United States ask? That these peoples receive as soon as possible the broadest possibilities of autonomous development. Taken literally, what do these words mean, except that the Austro-Hungarian Empire must transform itself into a federal State? Is this not precisely what Emperor Charles is in the process of doing? All things considered, this formula is perhaps the best means of breathing new life into the tottering edifice. To continue the war under these conditions would serve only to accumulate ruins and encourage the expansion of Communism throughout the Danubian basin..."

Masaryk and Benes have already confronted many perils. But perhaps they have never run one so great. If President Wilson accepted the hand extended to him by Emperor Charles and opened peace talks on the aforesaid bases, all their efforts would be reduced to nothing. Masaryk feels this so strongly that at a moment when his presence in Paris would be indispensable, he leaves precipitately for Washington. Through the intermediary of Colonel House, Senator Lodge, Secretary of State Lansing, and M. Herron, he exercises so strong an influence on the President of the United States that he brings him to modify his initial point of view. On 18 October,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Halicz, a small town of 12,000 inhabitants situated on the Dniester, gave its name to Galicia. It had been, in the Middle Ages, the capital of an ephemeral kingdom.

3. At this moment, President Wilson is so indispensable to the success of the coalition that the Allies

could not go against his decision. They would be obliged to align themselves with his policy.

4. “Masaryk exercised a decisive influence on the drafting of President Wilson’s reply,” writes Walter Schneefuss. (Österreich, p. 79.) Masaryk himself does not hide the role he played on this occasion and tells us in his Memoirs that before leaving America, he warmly thanked the President of the United States “for the understanding he had shown toward his arguments and the invaluable service he had rendered to his country.” (La Résurrection d’un État, p. 315.)

[[PDF page 116]]

Wilson replies to Count Andrassy with a note that is equivalent to a death sentence for Austria-Hungary:

The President considers it his duty to inform the Austro-Hungarian government that he cannot take into consideration its proposal of 7 October, because since 8 January, the date on which he formulated his “fourteen points,” events of the highest importance have occurred, which have naturally modified the attitude and responsibilities of the government of the United States. Among the fourteen conditions formulated at that time appeared the following clause:

“To the peoples of Austria-Hungary whose place among the nations we wish to safeguard, there must be given as soon as possible the widest possibility of autonomous development.”

Since then, the government of the United States has recognized the state of war between the Czechoslovaks and the Central Empires; the National Council is in fact a government carrying on war and endowed with the necessary authority to direct the political and military affairs of the Czechoslovaks. The government of the United States has likewise recognized, in the broadest fashion, the legitimacy of the Yugoslavs’ aspirations to independence. The President is therefore no longer in a position to accept simple “autonomy” as the basis of peace with these nations. It is for them, and not for him, to decide what proposals on the part of Austria-Hungary can satisfy their conceptions of their rights and their fate as members of the family of nations.

The same day, as if to give this declaration an irrevocable character and forestall the National Council of Prague, Masaryk, who is still in the United States, proclaims the independence of Czechoslovakia.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Washington Declaration, 18 October 1918. It seems that the American reply was communicated to Masaryk by Secretary of State Lansing even before it was sent to Vienna.

HISTORY OF THE GERMAN ARMY, V: THE TRIALS OF STRENGTH (1938)
Benoist-Méchin

English translation — Section 3 of 10
PDF pages 117–173
Translation note: rapid, accuracy-focused translation from the corrected embedded text layer. No new OCR was performed. Page markers from the source text are preserved.

[[PDF page 117]]

Wilson's reply, the tenor of which becomes known in Vienna on the evening of 21 October, plunges the imperial cabinet into consternation. By refusing to deal with Emperor Charles and by leaving to the Czechs and the Yugoslavs the task of setting their own peace conditions, it sounds the death knell of the Habsburg Monarchy. Already two days earlier (19 October), the National Council of Prague had formally repudiated the imperial manifesto of 16 October by declaring “that the Czechs could in no case be content with autonomy, and that only total independence could satisfy them.” The ritual formula concerning “the integrity of the Crown” is no longer pronounced. When the Crown Council meets on 22 October to examine the terms of the American note, it reaches the conclusion that it has nothing left to do but proceed itself to the liquidation of the Empire.

But Emperor Charles has only one desire: that this liquidation take place without bloodshed. On 23 October he charges Dr. Lammasch, president of the council, with taking all necessary measures to this end. On the 24th, Lammasch summons Messrs. Kramář, Rašín, and Tusar to Vienna in order to agree with them on the transfer of powers. After agreeing on the modalities of the operation, he gives the imperial authorities in Bohemia the order to collaborate with the leaders of the National Council. While Kramář goes to Geneva to meet Benes, and Tusar remains in Vienna to observe the course of events, Rašín returns to his headquarters.

During the night of 27 to 28 October, a telephone call from Tušar informs him that Andrassy has accepted all Wilson's conditions, including those concerning the Czechs and the Yugoslavs. He interprets this decision as a capitulation of the Monarchy and immediately informs his colleagues of the National Council. After a short deliberation, they decide to act.

In the early hours of 28 October, Anton Švehla and

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. They can demand no less, twenty-four hours after the declaration Masaryk has just made.

[[PDF page 118]]

F. Soukoup seize the Grain Office, the supply center for the whole country.

At 11:30, the National Council meets in full session.

At noon, Rašín, Švehla, and Soukoup burst into Count Coudenhove's office and summon him to hand over to them the entire administration of the country.

Meanwhile, Mr. Scheiner mobilizes the Sokols, with whom he takes charge of the police, communications, and civil administration. Within a few hours, the railway station, the post office, the bridges, and all public buildings in Prague are occupied. At 7 p.m., the National Council promulgates the first law of the Czechoslovak State:

The independent Czechoslovak State has come into being. In order to ensure the connection between the old legal order and the new state of things, the National Council, acting as the representative charged with exercising the sovereignty of the State, decides in the name of the Czech people:

Article 1. — The form of the Czechoslovak State will be determined by a National Assembly in agreement with the Czechoslovak National Council of Paris, both being organs of the unanimous will

of the Nation. Until then, the sovereignty of the State is exercised by the National Council [of Prague].

Art. 2. — All previous laws of the Land and of the Empire remain provisionally in force.

Art. 3. — All administrations remain in place and continue to carry out their functions.

Art. 4. — The present law enters into force this very day.

Art. 5. — The Bureau of the National Council is charged with its execution.

Signed: Soukoup, Srobar.
Confirmed at Prague, 28 October 1918.
Švehla, Rašín, Stříbrný.

In the capital, in smaller towns, and down to the smallest villages of the Slavic districts, Czech cadres —often improvised—replace the Austrian officials and immediately take the oath to the new government. Although filled with silent rage, the garrison commanders and the chiefs of the military districts obey the orders they have

[[PDF page 119]]

received from the Vienna cabinet. The last testimony of loyalty they can give their Emperor is to watch, without intervening, the dissolution of the Empire. But the next day, many of them break their swords in despair.

Meanwhile, the Germans of Bohemia have also taken important decisions. On 23 October, their National Council, presided over by Dr. Titta, charged a commission of twelve members with drafting the texts proclaiming their attachment to Austria. But the speed with which events are developing and the seizure of power at Prague by Messrs. Švehla and Rašín push them to accelerate their union with Vienna.

On 29 October, the deputies of the Austrian Reichsrat originating from northern Bohemia erect their country into an autonomous Land under the name of Deutschböhmen, or German Bohemia. They constitute themselves on their own authority into a Land Assembly (Landesversammlung) and place at its head a local government (Landesregierung), of which Mr. Pacher (German National) and Mr. Seliger (Social Democrat) respectively assume the presidency and vice-presidency.

On the same day, the Reichsrat deputies originating from eastern Bohemia, northern Moravia, and Austrian Silesia raise their constituencies to the rank of an autonomous Land under the name Sudetenland, or Land of the Sudetes. They place at its head Deputy Freissler, who takes the title of Landeshauptmann.

At the same time, the German populations of southern Moravia (Südmähren) constitute themselves as a Kreis under the direction of Deputy Teufel, who takes the title of Kreishauptmann and asks for the attachment of his territory to the Land of

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Area: 14,496 km². Population: 2,229,488 inhabitants, of whom 2,070,428 are Germans, 116,275 Czechs, and 42,775 foreign nationals (Staatsfremde). Main towns: Reichenberg, Pilsen, Teplitz, Aussig.

Secondary towns: Karlsbad, Marienbad, Eger, Saaz, Dux, Brüx, Komotau, Böhmisch-Leipa, Trautenau.

2. A few days later, Mr. Pacher is replaced by Mr. Rudolf Lodgman von Auen, who in turn takes the title of Landeshauptmann.

3. Area: 6,534 km². Population: 678,880 inhabitants, of whom 643,804 are Germans and 25,028 Czechs. Main town: Troppau. Secondary towns: Jägerndorf, Freiwaldau, Sternberg, Neutitschein, Mährisch-Trübau.

4. Area: 1,840 km². Population: 173,033 inhabitants, of whom 159,263 are Germans and 11,249 Czechs. Main town: Znaim.

[[PDF page 120]]

Lower Austria. The German inhabitants of the southern and central Böhmerwald (a territory stretching along the Austro-Bavarian border) constitute themselves as the Böhmerwaldgau and request their attachment to the Land of Upper Austria.

Finally, the three German islands of Brünn, Olmütz, and Iglau express the desire to remain attached to the Viennese administration.

The next day, 30 October, all these decisions are officially notified to the Reichsrat of Vienna.

*

At the hour when the Czechs are marching through the streets of Prague singing patriotic hymns, when the statues of Joseph II and Radetsky are being unbolted, when the Francis Joseph railway station is being renamed President Wilson Station, when groups of Sokols are tearing down the signs of German shops and removing from public buildings every inscription recalling the former imperial administration, Kramář and Benes meet in Geneva in a small lounge of the Hotel National. It is the first time since the beginning of the war that the leader of the internal Resistance and the representative of the Resistance abroad find themselves face to face. The two men have known each other for a long time. For years they have fought for the same cause: the independence of their country. Yet events have made them rivals—almost adversaries. Each

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Area: 3,281 km². Population: 176,237 Germans and 6,131 Czechs.

4. Area: 70 km². Population: 140,346 inhabitants, of whom 92,761 are Germans and 45,297 Czechs.

5. Area: 42 km². Population: 37,443 inhabitants, of whom 24,628 are Germans and [OCR break in source].

6. Area: 372 km². Population: 48,420 inhabitants, of whom 38,402 are Germans and 9,769 Czechs.

7. Deutschböhmen, Sudetenland, Kreis Südmähren, and Böhmerwaldgau have so far acted in dispersed order. But the pressure of events forces them to unite. To give more weight to their claims, they decide to designate themselves by the collective term Sudetendeutsche, or Sudeten Germans. Thus is born this word, which will have the historical fortune that is known.

8. Kramář arrived at Geneva on Saturday, 26 October 1918. Benes arrives there on the morning of the 28th, at the very hour when the National Council of Prague is in the process of taking power.

[[PDF page 121]]

of the interlocutors is aware of the gravity of the hour; but each possesses assets he cannot relinquish. That is why their confrontation will be dramatic.

As president and secretary general of the National Council of Paris, Masaryk and Benes have been recognized by all the Allied Powers. They bring with them subsidies, arms, and the protection of the victors. Without them, neither France nor England would have included the dismemberment of Austria among their war aims, and Wilson would have remained with his declarations of autonomy. They enjoy not only the support of all Czech colonies in Europe and America: they have concluded agreements with the Slovaks and the Ruthenians, who have agreed to join their fate to theirs. They dispose of an armed force of more than 100,000 men: the Legions, which are in France, in Italy, and in Siberia. Finally, they have received from the leaders of the Entente the promise of establishing an independent State “within the historical limits of the Czechoslovak Nation.” Do such advantages, won by hard struggle, not give them the right to speak as masters?

But Kramář does not arrive empty-handed either. He knows that he can count on the adhesion of the people, in whose eyes he symbolizes the Resistance far more than the exiles of London and Paris. He holds the territory, the Sokols, and the administration of the country. To remove him from power is practically impossible; it would provoke a rising in Prague.

“If you want to take power in Prague without taking account of our existence, you will be swept away!” he tells his interlocutor.

“And you, if you want to establish an independent Czechoslovak Government there without taking account of the will of the Allies, you will be crushed,” Benes retorts.

After several hours of discussion, during which the specter of civil war takes shape on the horizon, each of the two men realizes that he can do nothing against the other. Better still: that circumstances command them to come to an agreement. Very wisely, they agree that the National Councils of Prague and Paris will merge, in order to constitute a single government. This will be composed of members chosen from the two bodies.

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1. The American colonies paid them considerable sums, and the French Government granted them a loan of 400 million gold francs.

[[PDF page 122]]

Masaryk will become President of the Republic and Kramář president of the council. Benes will remain minister of foreign affairs, while Stefanik, Klofáč, Rašín, and Švehla will divide among themselves the portfolios of defense, interior, economy, and labor. Finally, the group of Czech deputies in the Reichsrat —to whom, for form's sake, a few Slovak delegates will be added—will transform itself into a Constituent Assembly. Thus every danger of schism will be averted. The Czechs will not be torn between two antagonistic representations.

This agreement testifies to great political maturity. But at the last moment, its application comes up against an unforeseen difficulty. The Allies have recognized Masaryk as the head of a belligerent nation. If the two executives merge and if he takes the head of them, it is obvious that Czechoslovakia must enter the war against the Central Empires. Now this is an eventuality before which Kramář recoils in terror, for it will break the agreements he has concluded with Dr. Lammasch and thanks to which the transfer of powers has so far been carried out without too much disorder. Kramář does the impossible to demonstrate to Benes how untimely this measure is. Unfortunately, this is a point on which Benes cannot compromise. If Czechoslovakia does not appear at the Peace Conference as a belligerent nation, its position will be considerably diminished.

It is therefore with a heavy heart that Kramář returns to Prague. The situation he finds there is much worse than before his departure. Disturbances have broken out at Böhmisch-Leipa, Warnsdorf, Lobositz, and Bilin. If the local military authorities have agreed to fold their arms, the same is not true of certain front-line units, which are flowing back with all their war matériel through Bohemia. In several places, they

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. “Informed in authentic fashion by the documents concerning our activity,” Benes writes, “and seeing the results of our action abroad, the Prague delegation wished, on its own initiative, to pay a special tribute to T. G. Masaryk... Thus the provisional government of Paris, recognized by the great Allied Powers, received the last and most important consecration: it was recognized by Prague. The unity of our liberating struggle in our country and abroad was solemnly assured and affirmed. It was the moral crowning of our national and juridical revolution.” (War Memoirs, II, pp. 384-393.)

2. The French notes of 29 June and 15 October, the English declarations of 9 August and 23 October, and the American declaration of 2 September, the Italian declarations of 3, 21, and 24 October, and the Serbian declaration of 24 October 1918 leave no doubt in this respect.

[[PDF page 123]]

have opened fire on the populations that tried to oppose their passage. Where there were detachments of Sokols, they replied. If collisions of this kind multiply, the liberation of the territory will end in a bloodbath.

To complicate matters further, the Czech railway workers' organizations, which have seized the rail network, have suspended all traffic with Vienna, depriving the capital of a good part of its supplies. Moreover, Count Coudenhove has categorically refused to hand over the German districts to the Czech authorities.

“Such an initiative exceeds my powers,” he firmly answered the members of the National Council who asked it of him. “It will be for the Peace Conference to determine the fate of German Bohemia.”

On hearing these words, Rašín lost his temper.

“The Czech Government,” he replied in a voice hoarse with anger, “denies any existence to the German cantons and, all the more, to German Bohemia! For us, this question is already decided. If you believe you must mention their names before me, I can only oppose you with the most energetic protest and

count on these words never again being pronounced here!”

But Count Coudenhove remained inflexible. Despairing of getting him to reverse his refusal, Rašín placed him under arrest and had him kept under guard in the Hradjin palace. For a moment, Kramář thinks of “defenestrating” him, following the historical precedent of 1618. But on reflection, he prefers to refrain. Such an act would be capable of setting the powder alight. The situation is already tense enough as it is. He has the Statthalter released and authorizes him to return home. At the same time, he gives the railway workers the order to reestablish rail relations with Austria. These two gestures are interpreted in Vienna as a sign of goodwill. Since the Czechs are trying not to push matters to the worst, the imperial cabinet promises to accelerate the withdrawal of all troops stationed in Bohemia but not belonging to the country.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. At this moment, the National Council of Prague has only 6,000 men, poorly armed, while Bohemia is still filled with Austro-German troops.

[[PDF page 124]]

The evacuation, begun on the morning of 31 October, continues during the following days. At dawn on 3 November, the last vestiges of the Imperial Army leave their barracks, taking their standards with them. Contrary to what might have been feared, their departure gives rise to no incident.

Kramář breathes again. The conflict is coming to an end. The Habsburg Empire is in agony. If he succeeds in gaining a few more days, perhaps even a few hours, Austria-Hungary will have ceased to exist and any declaration of war will have become superfluous...

In reasoning thus, Kramář is not mistaken. During the night of 2 to 3 November, the Crown Council decides to accept the conditions of the Allies. On the 4th, Austria lays down its arms. On the 11th, Germany does the same. The next day, Emperor Charles makes it known “that he renounces any participation in government affairs,” while the deputies of the Reichsrat, meeting as a National Assembly, proclaim the advent of the Republic and bring to power Dr. Renner, who thus becomes the first chancellor of the Austrian federal State.

Forty-eight hours later (14 November), the Czech Revolutionary National Assembly, convoked in Prague by Kramář, holds its first solemn session in the former Landtag of Bohemia. The deputies adopt by a show of hands the articles of the new Constitution, prepared in advance by the National Committee. After which, conforming to the stipulations of the Geneva Agreement, they unanimously elect Thomas Garrigue Masaryk head of state and appoint Kramář president of the council. Benes becomes minister of foreign affairs; Rašín, minister of finance; Švehla, minister of the interior; Klofáč, minister of defense; Stefanik, minister of war. The

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The armistice between the Allies and Austria-Hungary is signed at Padua, at the Villa Giusti.

3. It comprises 249 members, distributed as follows: 54 Agrarians; 49 Social Democrats; 40 “State Right” Democrats; 28 Czech Socialists; 24 Catholics; 4 Centralist Socialists; 1 member of the Moravian Artisans' Party; 40 members provisionally representing the Slovaks; 9 unaffiliated.

5. The military sector is thus split in two: Klofáč's authority extends over the troops of the interior and

the Sokols; Stefanik's over the troops outside the country, that is, the Legions of France, Italy, and

[[PDF page 125]]

first government of the Czechoslovak Republic is constituted.

*

A few days earlier (30 October 1918), one hundred and five Slovak personalities had met in assembly at Saint-Martin of Turiec, to ratify the Pittsburgh Agreement and proclaim “their will to be attached to the Czech nation.” Unfortunately, the composition of this congress is most questionable. If no deputy of the Germans of Bohemia sits in the Prague Assembly, no deputy of the Hungarians of Slovakia appears at the Congress of Saint-Martin. Moreover, neither the Slovak People's Party, nor the Christian Socials, nor the Slovak Social Democrats are represented there. Sixty percent of the members of the Assembly belong to the single National Party of Mathias Dula. The rest consists of “guests” who were chosen because of their pro-Czech sympathies.

That is why two other congresses meet a few days later, at Prešov and at Kosice, to protest against the decision taken by the Assembly of Saint-Martin and to express the wish “that Slovakia remain attached to Hungary.” But the leaders of Prague will see to it that the heads of the Entente know nothing about it.

In Ruthenia, on the other hand, because of the very violent fighting that is continuing in the Carpathians, the population is not in a position to pronounce for itself. It is therefore the Ruthenian emigration in America that will take it upon itself to ratify the Homestead Agreement. Meeting in congress at Scranton,

[Footnote continuation retained from OCR:] Siberia. His accidental death, which occurred on 4 May 1919, and the return of the Legions will put an end to this dyarchy.

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3. It will be remembered that the last paragraph of the Pittsburgh Agreement specified that the practical modalities of union with the Czechs “would later be fixed by the legal representatives of the Slovak people.” (See above, pp. 97-98.)

4. Although Slovakia is a fundamentally Catholic country, the Assembly contains only 15 Catholic delegates against 90 Protestants.

5. “The Assembly was in no way the representative of the Slovak nation, and still less of the entire population of the territory in question,” Mr. Yvau de Rakowsky, former member of the Hungarian Chamber of Deputies, will affirm. “It was a private association, comprising, so to speak, only a few leaders of the so-called ‘national’ party, which at that time had only two seats in the Budapest parliament.” (Lecture given at Geneva before the International Congress for the Defense of the Rights of Peoples, 10 September 1921.)

[[PDF page 126]]

(Pennsylvania) on 19 November 1918, the Ukrainian delegates originating from Ruthenia then have to choose between three solutions:

1. the pure and simple independence of the country;

2. its union with eastern Galicia and Bukovina, within Ukraine;

3. autonomy within the framework of the Czechoslovak State.

“The first solution was immediately set aside as not viable,” writes Elie Borschak. “The second won unanimous support in principle, but the situation of the moment made it practically impossible. There remained union with the Czechoslovak State. That is the solution that prevailed.”

Masaryk is in America when this news reaches him. He immediately embarks for Europe, where he arrives on 7 December. But the situation prevailing in Bohemia is still very confused. Fighting is taking place in the Carpathians and in southern Slovakia. The leaders of the Entente advise him not to go to Prague before their military missions have been able to install themselves there. That is why he will not arrive there until two weeks later.

On 21 December 1918, at 9 o'clock in the morning, the presidential train enters Wilson Station, decked out in the blue-white-red colors of the new Republic. The weather is cold but sunny. All the factories of the capital have ceased work in order to allow the workers to attend the ceremony. A crowd of more than five hundred thousand people presses into the great avenues and around the station. Clusters of spectators crowd onto balconies, onto roofs, into trees, and even onto the chimneys that dominate the buildings. The facades of the houses are decorated with foliage and flowers. The youth organizations, the unions, and the Sokols have brought their bands. A sea of flags sways in the wind. Nothing has been neglected to give the President a triumphal welcome. “It is a great day for Prague,” writes the local press, “even if one thinks

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. War was raging in Ukraine; the Poles threatened eastern Galicia, the immediate neighbor of Ruthenia; the Romanians occupied Bukovina.

3. In particular a French military mission, placed under the authority of General Mittelhauser.

[[PDF page 127]]

that our city already has more than a thousand years of history behind it. Perhaps it is the greatest day it has ever lived...”

A tremendous ovation rises when Masaryk appears on the steps of the station. For so many years the Czechs have been waiting for this moment! The women weep; the men stamp their feet and howl with joy. Masaryk pronounces a few words of welcome. But his voice is strangled with emotion. He pulls a handkerchief from his pocket, not to salute the crowd, but to wipe his pince-nez, completely misted with tears. Then he gets into a carriage and goes to the Hradjin amid an enthusiasm bordering on delirium.

“What did I feel and what did I think,” he writes in his Memoirs, “while Prague gave me this magnificent welcome? Was I satisfied? Was my joy great? Looking at all this splendor, the richness of the colors, of the costumes, of the flags and ornaments, responding to all these friendly salutes, I always had present in my mind the hard task that awaited me: to make a solid edifice of our restored

State. I was still caught in the chain of these thoughts when, in the afternoon, in Parliament, I pledged myself by a solemn oath, on my honor and my conscience, to watch over the welfare of the Republic and to observe its laws."

What the Czechs are celebrating during these days is more than the attainment of independence: it is a true resurrection. Yet many of their own are still missing from the roll call. Only in a few months, when the last Legionaries have been repatriated from Siberia, will the People, the State, and the Army—these three essential elements of national sovereignty—finally be reunited.

[[PDF page 128]]

THE OCCUPATION OF THE TERRITORY AND THE ELECTIONS OF 1919

However, one essential point still remains unsettled: the tracing of the borders of the new State. By a convention concluded on 23 October 1918 between Messrs. Benes and Pichon, the French Government undertook to create "a Czechoslovak State within its historical borders." But these words are empty of meaning. No Czechoslovak people, still less any Czechoslovak State, has existed until now. One would search in vain for its trace in atlases and history manuals. These terms are a creation of the National Council of Paris. Then what exists? In the heart of Bohemia, on the Moravian plateau, 6,430,000 Czechs, placed under the suzerainty of the Habsburgs since 1526; on the southern slope of the Beskids and the Tatra Mountains, 2,334,000 Slovaks, incorporated into Hungary since the eleventh century; in the area between the Carpathians and the Theiss, 460,000 Ruthenians, likewise placed under the tutelage of the Magyars. Czechs, Slovaks, and Ruthenians have their particular physiognomy, which they are firmly determined to see respected. And because they were long subjected to foreign domination, they are touchily sensitive to anything that might infringe upon their language, customs, or ancestral traditions.

Yet the greatest obstacles are not on that side.

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4. They are also designated by the name Ukrainians or Subcarpathian Russians.

[[PDF page 129]]

They are in Bohemia and Moravia, where 3,349,000 inhabitants of Germanic origin stubbornly refuse to let themselves be governed by Czechs. Their representatives have not ceased repeating this, at Prague as much as at Frankfurt or Vienna. Since the conclusion of the armistice, these positions have hardened further. For, on one hand, the Austrian National Assembly claims to extend its authority over all German-language territories that belonged to the former Monarchy; on the other, it expresses the wish to see all Austria incorporated into Germany (including the Germans of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia). The Czech leaders therefore find themselves placed before a thorny situation.

That the Allies should allow Austria to integrate itself into the Reich seems excluded, for in that case Germany would emerge enlarged from its defeat. It is not without reason that Mr. Pichon, the French minister of foreign affairs, proclaimed on 29 September 1918 from the rostrum of the Palais-Bourbon "that the victors would not hesitate to use force to prevent Austria from merging with Germany." (It will not, moreover, be necessary to go to that extreme: it will be enough to declare that Austria, being independent, is forbidden to alienate its freedom.)

But the problem is much more delicate concerning the Sudetes. By pushing Wilson to demand that the subject peoples “receive their full independence” (and not simple autonomy), the Czechs have placed in his

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Declaration of the Austrian Provisional National Assembly, 21 November 1918: “The German-Austrian federal State (der Deutsch-oesterreichische Bundesstaat) claims sovereignty over all territory populated by Germans and particularly over the Land of the Sudetes. The German-Austrian federal State will oppose any annexation by other nations of territories populated by German peasants, workers, and bourgeois.”

2. Declaration of Dr. Renner, Chancellor of Austria, 12 November 1918: “Our people, in all its parts, wishes to recognize only one thing: that Germany and Austria form a single race and a single community of destiny.
Declaration of Scheidemann, at the opening of the Weimar Parliament, 6 February 1919: “May the time be near when our Austrian brothers will come back to take their place within the great Germanic community.”
Proclamation of the Austrian National Assembly, 2 March 1919: “Austria must be considered an integral part of the German Reich.”
Declaration of the Weimar Parliament, 11 August 1919: “German Austria will be given, within the Reichstag, representation proportional to the figure of its population on the day when its attachment to the Reich has become effective.” (See vol. IV, pp. 392-393.)

[[PDF page 130]]

hands a double-edged weapon. Independence rests on the free right of peoples to dispose of themselves. Will the President of the United States accept that this right be granted to some and denied to others? Will he tolerate such a departure from his own declarations before the American Congress? Yet that is what would be necessary, Benes and his collaborators think. For if the Sudetes were attached to Vienna or Berlin—or if they received only the right to administer themselves—Czechoslovakia would lose four-fifths of its economic potential. It is in fact in the German districts (strongly industrialized in comparison with the predominantly agricultural Slavic districts) that the iron, hard coal and coal, lead, mercury, silver, and graphite mines are found. It is there that the steel and chemical works, foundries, breweries, glassworks, sugar refineries, weaving mills, and spinning mills are concentrated. More still: to take away from Czechoslovakia the rampart of mountains that protects it on three sides would be to tear away its cuirass and deliver it defenseless to the enterprises of its enemies. If it wants to assure its existence and play a determining role in the affairs of Central Europe, it must hold the whole Bohemian quadrilateral firmly. And to do this, it must occupy it immediately, in order to confront the Peace Conference with the fait accompli.

This occupation begins on 5 November 1918, that is, a few days after the collapse of the Monarchy. Its execution is facilitated by the fact that the Czechs, installed at Prague, start from a central position from which the railways radiate in all directions, while the Sudetes, who occupy a peripheral territory, can neither gather their forces nor coordinate their action. Moreover, the Germans are convinced that this occupation will only be temporary and that the Peace Conference will oblige the Czechs to evacuate a territory that has never belonged to them. Finally, the Czechs,

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1. It is not for nothing that the mountain chain serving as the border between Bohemia and Saxony is called the Erzgebirge, or “Ore Mountains.”

[[PDF page 131]]

supported by the Entente, consider themselves part of the camp of the victors, while the Sudetes, crushed by defeat and abandoned to themselves, are reduced to defending themselves with only the means at hand.

Already the municipality of Aussig, where Spartacist elements have begun to pillage arms and food depots, has sent an appeal for help to the Saxon Government sitting at Leipzig. The latter replied:

“We can do nothing for you! Form a Volkswehr and make do with the elements you can recruit on the spot.”

The municipality then turned to the Government of Prague to ask it to protect it against the exactions of the Communists. An imprudent step! For the Czech leaders immediately took advantage of it to have the city occupied (11 November 1918). As a result, the German territories find themselves split in two, which makes it impossible for the Sudetes to gather their forces.

Since the old imperial city of Reichenberg risks suffering the same fate, because it is situated close to Czech territory, the Landesregierung decides to transfer its seat to Teplitz. The Czechs immediately attack in that direction. At the moment when their troops want to enter Brüx, Dr. Hérold, mayor of the town, who has rapidly formed a small Volkswehr, gives the order for the latter to oppose them with arms (27 November). Three times in succession, during the same afternoon, the Volkswehr drives back the Czech forces, though they are four times superior in number. It is only the next day, when the Czechs have received reinforcements from all sides, that they manage to seize the locality.

After a few days of rest, the Czech detachments set out again. On 3 December they occupy Dux; on the 5th, Saaz; on the 7th, Teplitz; on the 9th, Marienbad; on the 11th, Leitmeritz; on the 12th, Karlsbad; on the 13th, Tetschen and Bodenbach; on the 16th, Komotau and Eger. The day before, the members of the Landesregierung fled to Zittau in Saxony. Shortly afterward,

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1. The Austrian National Assembly may well vote motions claiming sovereignty over the Sudeten territories, but it is quite incapable of enforcing them. Vienna and Berlin are struggling with difficulties that prevent them from thinking of anyone other than themselves. Revolution rumbles in Munich and Dresden; a Polish insurrection is being prepared in Silesia.

2. Very poorly received by the revolutionary Saxon Government, they take refuge

[[PDF page 132]]

Czech troops have made their entry into Reichenberg. All German Bohemia is in their hands.

Emboldened by this success, which moreover has not cost them much, the Czechs decide to extend their occupation to the German districts of Moravia and Silesia. Between 2 and 15 December 1918, they seize in rapid succession Mährisch-Trübau, Fulneck, Neutitschein, Mährisch-Neustadt, and Sternberg. On the 18th, they enter Troppau. The local German administration dissolves of its own

accord. In the last days of December, the Czechs install control posts at Jägerndorf, Freudenthal, and Freiwaldau. Totally disoriented, the Sudetes have had time neither to arm themselves nor to react.

In Moravia, the occupation meets in places with much livelier resistance. At Zlabings, Pracht, Misslitz, and Unter-Wisternitz, bloody collisions occur, and even artillery duels between groups of Legionaries and elements of the Volkswehr, without the Czech advance being slowed for all that. Two Austrian free corps, hastening from Vienna to lend a hand to their compatriots, are promptly disarmed and pushed back toward the south. On 1 January 1919, Legionaries and Sokols make their entry into Presburg (Slovakia), whose name is immediately replaced by that of Bratislava.

While these operations are taking place, the two divisions of Legionaries formed at Padua have penetrated into Slovakia, in order to support the part of the population favorable to union and reduce the recalcitrant minority to silence. But there, things happen in quite another way.

If the small detachments of Sokols and Legionaries launched by the Prague Government against German

[Footnote continuation retained from OCR:] in Vienna, where they will remain until 24 September 1919, to protest against “the illegal occupation of their country.”

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1. It should also be noted that they are torn by serious divergences of opinion. Among the propertied classes, many fear merging with the Reich at the moment when the Spartacist Revolution seems likely to prevail. The Socialists think that an accommodation with Prague, where a socialist government sits, would be much more advantageous for the Sudeten populations. As for the rural strata, they cannot reconcile themselves to the idea that the Austrian Monarchy has definitively disappeared, and they recoil before the prospect of a disintegration of the lands of the former Crown of Bohemia-Moravia. (Cf. Boris Celovsky, Das Münchener Abkommen, p. 102.)

[[PDF page 133]]

Bohemia were able to progress so rapidly, it was because they were heavily armed and advanced by surprise into regions stripped of troops. It is not the same in Slovakia, where the Czech divisions run up against regular units of the Hungarian army, which energetically refuse to yield the ground to them. A series of very violent engagements follows. Facing the Carpathians, the Hungarians take the offensive along the Surany-Levice-Modry-Kamen-Lučenec line. In certain sectors of the front, the Czechs must bring in reinforcement artillery. But the Hungarian attacks increase in intensity. Fearing that they will be outflanked, the Czechs appeal to the Allies for help. Clemenceau then sends a peremptory note to the Government of Budapest, summoning it to put an end to hostilities and immediately evacuate all Slovakia (4 December).

During the following days, a suspension of arms is concluded between the local commanders. With rage in their hearts, the Hungarians withdraw south of a line of demarcation traced by General Mittelhauser.

The cessation of fighting in southern Slovakia allows the Czech units to continue their march eastward. On 12 January 1919, the first Legionaries arrive at Uzhhorod, the capital of Ruthenia. Two weeks

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2. It corresponds approximately to the Hungarian-Slovak border as it had been envisaged during the negotiations that led to the Pittsburgh Agreement. (See above, pp. 97-98.)

3. They arrive there at the same time as Mr. Zatkovič, leader of the Ukrainian colony in America. He has come to submit to the approval of the populations the text of the two agreements concluded at Homestead and Scranton. (See above, p. 98 and pp. 121-122.) But the Ruthenian deputies, meeting in assembly at Uzhhorod, show little eagerness to ratify them. Union with Czechoslovakia pleases them much less than a merger with eastern Galicia, Bukovina, and Ukraine proper, for they would then form part of a country of 938,000 km², populated by 42 million inhabitants. More than their compatriots who emigrated to the United States, they find it hard to renounce this age-old dream, which Muscovite claims over Ukraine, Polish claims over Galicia, and Romanian claims over Bukovina have so far made practically unrealizable. On 18 March 1919, through the intermediary of the Ukrainian delegation in Paris, they will have a very sharp protest delivered to the Allies against the occupation of Bukovina by Romanian troops. But the Allies will take no account of it. Seeing every possibility of extension to the east close before them, they will finally opt for union with Czechoslovakia. Yet it is only on 16 May 1919, that is, on the eve of the signing of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, that the National Council of Uzhhorod will vote for the attachment of Ruthenia to the Czechoslovak State. It will then send a special delegation to the Peace Conference to make this decision known to the Allies. (Elie Borschak, L'Ukraine à la Conférence de la Paix, p. 137.)

[[PDF page 134]]

later, small armed detachments, framed and equipped by the Entente, are deployed along the outer limit of all the territories claimed by the Government of Prague.

During the following weeks, the Germans of Bohemia, no longer knowing what to do, resort to passive resistance. They boycott Czech shops, avoid speaking to Czech officials, and act in everything as though the Czechs did not exist. But then an unexpected opportunity arises for them to demonstrate their state of mind otherwise than in a silent and negative way.

In the last days of December 1918, the Austrian National Assembly, issuing from the former Reichsrat, decided to constitute itself as a Constituent Assembly and, to that end, to proceed with general elections. The electoral consultation, which will take place in the course of February 1919, must extend to all Austria, including the German districts of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. Let the populations of these regions express their will to live together by a clear and indisputable vote! Let them make of these elections a striking demonstration of Germanic solidarity! The Allies will indeed be obliged to register the fact...

The Sudeten national groups, first among which are the National Party and the German National-Socialist Workers' Party, immediately set to work to give the consultation the character of a plebiscite. But in this time of unemployment and misery, the struggle for daily bread prevails over concerns of language and race. From the opening of the campaign, they have the painful experience of finding that the far-left elements and the Marxist unions refuse to associate themselves with their efforts. Not content with denouncing them as the henchmen of militarism and reaction, they invite their adherents to abstain from going to the polls. This attitude does not merely deal a fatal blow

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1. Only the fear of annexing a greater number of foreign populations, which would make the Czechs a minority in their own country, restrains them from going farther.

2. On instructions from the Third International, all members of the Marxist unions who go to the polls will have their membership card withdrawn and will receive

[[PDF page 135]]

to the unity of the “German Front.” It also allows the Czechs to go over to the counteroffensive.

Putting back into force article 65 of the former imperial Constitution, which punishes severely “all those who attack the unity of the State by their acts, words, or writings,” the Prague authorities have meetings banned, posters torn down, the offices of the national parties ransacked, and, under various pretexts, everyone who takes part, from near or far, in the electoral campaign incarcerated. The Sudeten nationalists may struggle as they will: in the end, they are forced to give up the contest. Police surveillance is so close that the elections cannot take place. No newly elected representative of the Germans of Bohemia will therefore sit in the Parliament of Vienna, with which, henceforth, all bridges are cut.

Then the Germans begin to sense the fate awaiting them. “The territories occupied by the Germans are ours, and will remain ours! Let the immigrants and colonists leave!” Masaryk declared upon his arrival in Prague. Could this threat really be realized? Reduced to powerlessness, they feel a heavy leaden cover fall back upon them. They anxiously ask themselves whether the Czechs are not going to make them submit to the law of the strongest, while waiting to relegate them to the rank of a subject people...

In a surge of despair, they decide to call the world to witness the violence being done to them. This time the wave is so strong that all parties without exception are obliged to rally to it. 4 March 1919 arrives: it is the day when the new Austrian Assembly holds its opening session. At the very hour when the deputies meet in the Vienna Parliament, the machines stop, the factories empty, the trains come to a halt throughout all the German territories of Bohemia and Moravia. The mines, the foundries, and the spinning mills are abandoned. All the inhabitants of the towns and villages go down into the street. More than a million and a half men, women, and children gather in the squares to proclaim their will to remain Germans. Peasants and workers, bourgeois and shopkeepers embrace and fraternize.

[Footnote continuation retained from OCR:] no unemployment benefit. At that time, such a sanction exposes them to starvation.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Especially at Saaz, Leitmeritz, Brüx, Aussig, and Gablonz.

[[PDF page 136]]

Never has German Bohemia known such unanimity.

But this day will remain engraved in dark lines in the memory of those who lived through it. For the Czechs suddenly take fright before the scale of the reaction they themselves have provoked. At Kaaden, Sternberg, Arnau, Eger, Karlsbad, Mies, and elsewhere, exasperated Legionaries open fire on the crowd. Men, women, and children collapse under the bullets. The walls of the town halls are splattered with blood. The next day, when the victims are counted, their number is found to be 53 dead and several hundred wounded.

The lesson is bitter, but it will be retained. The Germans now know that all resistance is useless. They placed their trust in the promises of President Wilson. The Czechs placed theirs in the use of force. Only the Peace Conference will say which were right...

But the Czechs would present themselves there in a much stronger position if they succeeded in "normalizing" their relations with the German populations and in persuading international opinion that these populations were perfectly accommodating themselves to the presence of their troops. Although they exercise rigorous control over the press and allow as little news as possible to filter outside, they fear that the hostility of the minorities may eventually become known abroad and provoke unfavorable reactions among certain leaders of the Entente. Not in France, where Clemenceau, Berthelot, and Pichon are entirely won over to the Czechoslovak cause. But in England, where Lloyd George insists that plebiscites be held in most of the contested territories. What would happen if this procedure were applied to all of Bohemia and southern Slovakia? To prevent this danger, the Government of Prague decides to resort to

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2. Especially in Schleswig, in the Saar, in East Prussia (Allenstein), and in Upper Silesia.

[[PDF page 137]]

an adroit maneuver: it orders municipal elections to take place on 15 June 1919 in all the districts of the new State.

At the end of May, the representatives of the German Lands meet at Teplitz-Schönau to examine what tactic to follow.

Reversing the position they had taken during the elections for the Parliament of Vienna, the leaders of the right-wing parties implore their compatriots to abstain from voting:

"Do you not see, then, that these elections are a trap?" they tell them. "By taking part in them, you will appear to recognize that the laws of the Czechoslovak State apply to you as well. The leaders of Prague will seize upon this argument to affirm that you have rallied to their regime, and that you consider yourselves Czechoslovak citizens. By acting in this way, you will strip yourselves of your right to self-determination and make the organization of a plebiscite impossible."

The leaders of the left-wing parties are of the opposite opinion, for they hope to have Marxist municipalities elected everywhere thanks to the abstention of right-wing voters.

"For our part," they declare through the voice of Mr. Czermak, the head of the Social Democratic Party, "we will vote on 15 June, whatever arguments may be put to us."

Not wishing to leave the field free to the parties of the left, the national parties agree to present candidates in the elections as well. They resign themselves to this only reluctantly, for they feel that this decision will be heavy with consequences.

The future is not slow in demonstrating how well founded their apprehensions were. The elections take place on the scheduled date. Although the Czechs received only 8 percent of the votes in certain communes of Bohemia and although, in southern Slovakia, eighty-three people were killed or wounded by the police during the numerous anti-Czech demonstrations that took place during the day, the

consultation represents a striking success for the Government of Prague. What mattered to it above all was not the distribution of votes, but the fact that the whole of the popu-

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Record of the debates of the Teplitz-Schönau Congress, 31 May-2 June 1919.

[[PDF page 138]]

lations had voted. Henceforth, it is in a position to affirm that there are no longer in Czechoslovakia Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, and Hungarians, but fourteen million citizens equal before the law, and that any attempt to modify this state of things would be an intolerable interference in the internal affairs of the country.

Having thus put all possible trumps on its side, the Czech Government can approach the peace negotiations without fear.

[[PDF page 139]]

VI
THE LAST BATTLE:
THE TREATY OF SAINT-GERMAIN

The Peace Congress opened in Paris on 19 January 1919. While Masaryk has returned to Prague, Benes has remained on Rue Bonaparte, to watch the horizon and keep contact with the leaders of the Entente. He has done well. For even before the opening of the Conference (13 December 1918), the Austrian Government proposed to the Allies, through the intermediary of the Swiss Government, that the contested territories—and especially the German districts of Bohemia—be submitted to a plebiscite, or that their borders be delimited by an arbitration tribunal presided over by a neutral country.

For a moment, Wilson appeared favorable to this procedure, but Benes immediately intervened to have it set aside. He did not, moreover, have much difficulty. Eight days later (20 December), Mr. Pichon rejected the Swiss proposal by declaring that the establishment of the borders of the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire fell not to an arbitration tribunal, but to the Peace Conference itself, adding “that, in the interval, Czechoslovakia was entitled to occupy the whole territory of Bohemia, by virtue of the promise made to it of seeing itself reconstituted within its historical borders.” Since the Vienna Government observed that the term “historical borders” was liable to receive the most diverse interpretations, Benes obtained from

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Where the seat of the former National Council is located.

2. Meeting in Paris in an inter-Allied conference, in order to prepare the work of the Peace Conference proper.

[[PDF page 140]]

Clemenceau that he specify its meaning. The French president of the council then specified that these borders included “the whole of Bohemia, Moravia, and Austrian Silesia.” This was at once to endorse the occupation of the German cantons and to settle in advance the fate of their populations. Transmitted

to Vienna, this reply caused a certain stir there. All the more because on 7 January 1919, England and Italy aligned themselves with this view and Wilson—torn between the contradictory advice lavished on him by his entourage and totally ignorant of the problems of Central Europe—finally, out of weariness, rallied to it as well. Thus a mechanism is created from which the Conference will no longer be able to escape.

This first success, won by Benes in the wings of the Conference, is followed shortly by a disappointment. By constantly invoking the heroism of their Legions and by having themselves recognized by the Allies as the leaders of a country at war with the Central Empires, Masaryk and Benes believed they had acquired the right to sit at the green table of the Conference on an equal footing with the other belligerents. But this is not the case. Not wishing to let themselves be submerged by the small powers, the four Great Powers composing the "Supreme Council" (that is, Clemenceau, Lloyd George, Wilson, and Orlando) agreed to keep them away from their deliberations. They entrusted the task of fixing the borders of Austria to a "Council of Five," composed exclu-

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1. And not only a mechanism: the staging of the replies to this first Austrian request illuminates the respective position of the Allied governments with respect to the problems of Central Europe.

France regards the extension of its influence in this region of the continent as an important factor in its security. It decides and moves ahead without worrying about the reactions of the other Powers, convinced that they will end by following it.

England has attained its essential war aims: the destruction of German naval power and the enlargement of its Empire in the Middle East by the acquisition of the vast oil territories that had belonged to the Ottoman Empire. The problems of Central Europe interest it only subsidiarily. It is therefore ready to leave France a free hand there, provided that its power there does not become exorbitant.

The United States, all-powerful during the last months of the war, has lost much of its influence since the signing of the armistices. Its prestige is in decline. Wilson, whose health leaves more and more to be desired, is overwhelmed by the mass of problems posed by the drafting of the Peace Treaty and for whose solution he is in no way prepared. Pulled in every direction, exasperated by the perpetual demands of the successor states, he is soon reduced to trailing behind his colleagues. In the end, he will succumb to a cerebral thrombosis and the Congress of the United States will refuse to ratify the treaties.

sively of the ministers of foreign affairs of France, Great Britain, the United States, Italy, and Japan. They instituted a "Special Commission for Czechoslovakia," a "Commission for Poland," both presided over by Jules Cambon, and a "Commission for Minorities," presided over by Philippe Berthelot. No confrontation will take place between victors and vanquished. They will meet only for the handing over of the peace conditions and their final signature. If they have observations to make, they must do so in writing. As for the small States, they will be called for consultation whenever the Supreme Council judges it necessary.

This procedure appears humiliating to the Czechoslovak delegation, led by Kramář, Benes, and Osusky. They already saw themselves dictating their will to the Austrian and Hungarian delegations and making them feel harshly how much times had changed. They must give this up. But on reflection,

they realize that the system adopted does not offer only disadvantages. While the defeated will be reduced to silence, the Czechs will undergo no hindrance in the exposition of their points of view, for they have influential friends in all the bodies of the Conference. In the Supreme Council, they know they can count on the support of Clemenceau. In the Council of Five, three votes are won for them: those of Messrs. Pichon, Balfour, and Lansing. In the Commission for Austria, they are supported by Cambon. In the Commission for Minorities, they have an ardent defender in the person of Berthelot. They will therefore be able to make their theses prevail, even if only through intermediaries. Only, as they will have the right to express themselves only in writing, the result will be a mountain of notes and counter-notes, protests and memorandums, among which observers will find it hard to find their way.

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1. Arriving from Prague in the first half of January, Dr. Kramář took the head of the delegation as president of the Czechoslovak council. But since he knows no one in Paris, while Benes has a vast network of relations there, it is the minister of foreign affairs who will continue to conduct the negotiations.

[[PDF page 142]]

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Two documents emerge from this heap of paperwork. One is the Memorandum given by Benes to Cambon and Berthelot on 5 February 1919, which contains the essentials of the Czechoslovak theses. The other is the Address drawn up for President Wilson by Messrs. Lodgman, Seliger, and Freissler, in the name of the Sudetes, and presented to the Supreme Council in the course of June.

Here are the arguments set out in Benes's Memorandum:

I. Preamble.

The basic problem to be settled is that of the coexistence of Slavic and Germanic populations within the Czechoslovak State. At first sight, this problem appears insoluble. In reality, we believe ourselves able to demonstrate that it is much easier to solve than is believed.

It is true that some three million Germans live on Czechoslovak territory. The Czechoslovak Government nonetheless asks that these populations be included within the borders of the new State, in the name of the right of peoples not only to dispose of themselves, but to ensure their survival and freely shape their own destiny.

II. Statistical data.

According to the official Austrian statistics of 1910, 3,512,862 Germans live in the Czechoslovak lands, of whom:

2,467,724 in Bohemia,
719,435 in Moravia, and
325,523 in Silesia.

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1. Known under the name of Memorandum III (for it had been preceded by two other memorandums of

the same sort, though less developed), this document, some forty pages long, fell in September 1920 into the hands of the former German deputies of Bohemia, who published it in extenso in the newspaper Bohemia, from 10 to 19 October 1920. It was later taken up by Hermann Raschhofer in Die Tschechoslowakischen Denkschriften für die Friedenskonferenz von Paris 1919-1920 (Berlin, 1937) and by A. de Lapradelle in La Tchécoslovaquie de Munich à Prague, Revue de Droit international XXII, Paris 1938, pp. 363-740. Extremely displeased by the disclosure of these texts, Benes described their publication as “an unfriendly act” and argued “that the situation in 1937 was very different from that of 1919 and that, eighteen years after the Peace Treaties, he would have drafted them differently.” (Cf. his interview with the deputies of the Sudeten Party on 24 August 1938, Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, 398.)

2. Given the length of this Memorandum, it has been impossible for us to give here more than a scrupulous but succinct summary of it.

[[PDF page 143]]

In Moravia, the Germans live dispersed and nowhere form compact, exclusively German masses.

In Silesia, the problem is posed differently. The Czechoslovaks claim all Austrian Silesia because their State must have as long a common border as possible with Poland. It is important that the Germans not form a wedge that would separate the two Slavic States and would thrust too deeply toward the center of the Czechoslovak State not to threaten it.

It is therefore necessary to take account only of the Germans of Bohemia. These, numbering 2,467,724, inhabit a territory situated along the northern and western borders of the country. But they do not form a homogeneous whole; they can be divided into three distinct groups:

a) The Cheb-Žatec group (Eger-Saaz);
b) The Liberec group (Reichenberg);
c) The group in the southern part of Bohemia.

Within these three groups there exist vast enclaves of Czechoslovak population. Thus, for example, in the Cheb-Žatec group, which is the strongest and where about 1 million Germans are found, more than 300,000 Czechs also live. The percentage of the Czech minority therefore reaches 30 to 35 percent, even in the regions most heavily populated by Germans. In mining regions such as those of Duchcov and Teplice, the Czech element reaches as much as 50 percent. The official Austrian statistics have always been shamefully falsified. One could cite a very great number of examples that would reveal the procedures used by the imperial administration to lower the figure of the Czechoslovak population in these regions and to make people believe that they were entirely German.

In CONCLUSION, it follows from these data:

1. That in Bohemia, the number of Germans, which according to Austrian statistics amounts to 2,467,724, must be reduced by 800,000 to 1 million, because of the systematic falsifications committed by the Austrian census-takers and the pressures exerted on the Czechoslovak population.

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2. These figures depart considerably from the Austrian statistics, according to which there were, in 1910, in the 36 constituencies of northeastern and northwestern Bohemia, 1,878,000 Germans against

122,000 Czechs. The proportion would therefore not be 70 percent against 30 percent, but 94 percent against 6 percent. Accused of having falsified the official statistics, Benes replied on 13 May 1921: “This Memorandum was drafted in haste, on the basis of insufficient information. It was moreover only a simple aide-memoire, to which exaggerated importance should not be attributed.” Yet it is this document that will fix the opinion of the Supreme Council.

[[PDF page 144]]

2. That everywhere in these regions, the Czech population is closely mixed with the German population and that there are virtually no truly German districts.

3. That the German populations situated along the borders of Bohemia are divided into three different groups having between them neither sufficient communications nor common economic interests.

These three groups cannot form an autonomous province, if only because of their geographic position. Nor can they be attached to Austria for the same reason. If they did not remain in Bohemia, they would have to be attached to Germany. But this solution would present very serious disadvantages, and one can oppose to it a multitude of arguments (economic, strategic, political, etc.), all of which militate in favor of maintaining these so-called German regions within the Czechoslovak Republic.

III. Economic reasons.

Two of the German groups of Bohemia, the northern and northwestern ones, are particularly rich in raw materials and industries (metallurgy, textiles, mines, radium, etc.). All these factories and mines maintain close relations with Prague and the center of Bohemia, while a barrier of mountains separates them from Prussian Silesia, Saxony, and Bavaria. If these regions were detached from Bohemia, not only would the industrial and economic life of the country be mutilated, but these regions themselves would fall into ruin, the neighboring Czech population would be gravely affected, and the economic power—that is, the vital force—of the Czechoslovak State would be considerably diminished.

In conclusion, economic reasons oppose the separation of the so-called German regions of Bohemia from Czechoslovakia. If it were done:

1. The Czechoslovak State would be hard hit in its economic life and threatened with becoming a dependency of Germany.

2. These same German regions would be doomed to ruin.

IV. Strategic reasons.

Bohemia forms a geographic entity, admirably defended by the mountains that surround it: to take this mountain fortress away from the Czechs is to allow the Germans to install themselves in the plain of Bohemia and place their guns sixty kilometers from Prague, which would then be in an indefensible situation.

[[PDF page 145]]

V. Political reasons.

It is also necessary to take into consideration the fact that the Germans of Bohemia are colonists or descendants of colonists. For centuries, the various reigning families called German colonists into Bohemia to increase the revenues of the royal treasury. Later, when the Habsburgs had defeated the Czechs at White Mountain (1620), they brought in a great number of Germans to Germanize the country completely. Soon only the German language was admitted. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Viennese governments continued to act in the same way.

To this end, they invented and propagated by every means the idea that there existed a German Bohemia, which they had made a domain reserved exclusively for Germans. To strengthen the insecure position of the Germans, they sent to Bohemia a great number of German bureaucrats and gendarmes. Strong in the support of the imperial Government, the Germans engaged in all sorts of persecutions against the Czechs, which was intended—in Vienna's thinking—to bring about in the long run their eviction from the country and lead to its total Germanization.

To this centuries-old penetration, founded on violence and arbitrariness, the Czechs responded by a struggle of every moment. During the Hussite wars, they succeeded in ridding Bohemia almost completely of the Germans. But this advantage was lost again in the seventeenth century, when the Czechs were defeated by the Habsburgs.

From the nineteenth century onward, the Czechs recovered. Despite all the obstacles placed in their way by the dynasty, they finally reconquered almost the whole country. So-called German towns rapidly transformed themselves into Czech towns. The regions that remained German are only the vestige of the former position of the German colonists in Bohemia. This position is today in the process of disappearing.

The Czechs restored the situation by opposing the principle of democracy to that of autocracy, on which German hegemony was founded. It must be realized that Prague, sixty years ago, had the appearance of a German city; that during the last twenty years, a considerable number of German towns have fallen into the hands of the Czechs, and that these towns today have, so to speak, not a single German inhabitant left. A kind of “colonization in reverse” has occurred. It must be added that the Czechs waged this struggle loyally, using only intellectual weapons.

[[PDF page 146]]

This movement has intensified further in recent years, as a result of the attraction exerted on Czech peasants by the possibilities of employment in the industrial regions. The result has been an increase in commercial exchanges, but also a mixing of populations that has made the districts once held by the Germans more and more mixed regions. If the so-called German regions were separated from the Czech regions, the result would be serious social and economic crises, perhaps even conflicts opposing the new Czechoslovak State to its neighbors.

VI. The fate of the Germans in the Czechoslovak Republic.

It is absolutely necessary to know exactly how the Germans will be treated in the Czechoslovak State. Not only is the Czechoslovak Republic prepared to accept, if need be, any international law established in favor of minorities by the Peace Conference, but it is ready to anticipate such a law by giving the Germans from now on all the rights owed to them.

The Czechoslovak Republic will be an absolutely democratic State; all elections there will be held by

universal suffrage; all magistracies there will be accessible to all citizens; the languages of the minorities will be admitted everywhere; the right to have their own schools, their judges, and their courts will never be contested to any minority. The Germans will have in Bohemia the same rights as the Czechoslovaks. The German language will be the second language of the country and no vexatious measure will ever be used against the German part of the population. In a word, the regime will be similar to that of Switzerland.

(There follows a certain number of newspaper articles and declarations emanating from Germans of Bohemia, all of which corroborate the theses of the Czechoslovak Government.)

In conclusion, from the arguments and facts we have just reviewed, it follows:

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1. The allusion to Switzerland apart, one wonders how Benes can reconcile this text with that of the thesis he defended in 1908 before the Academy of Dijon, when, aged twenty-four, he did not foresee the political role that the future reserved for him. “In fact,” one reads there, “the reconciliation of the two peoples of Bohemia is possible only if both enjoy complete autonomy. One must be separated from the other. The peaceful cohabitation of two or three different peoples, as is the case in Switzerland, requires a long historical evolution.” (Benes, Le Problème autrichien et la question tchèque, Paris, 1908.)

2. In his work entitled Die Tschechoslowakei, published in Munich in 1925, Hugo Hassinger sifts all these testimonies and reduces them to nothing, especially a supposed workers' meeting at Eger that never took place. (Op. cit., pp. 600-601.) But Hassinger himself is open to caution because of his overly partial positions.

[[PDF page 147]]

1. That the Germans of Bohemia do not represent a united element, organized and led toward precise aims.

2. That they have no leaders enjoying the confidence of the population and that there is no popular movement there of real strength, authorized to invoke the principle of the right of peoples to dispose of themselves.

3. That, on the contrary, those among the Germans of Bohemia who are currently capable of expressing a considered political opinion declare, willingly or unwillingly, that economic interests push the Germans of Bohemia to prefer the Czechoslovak State to a Greater Germany, and that the attachment of German Bohemia to the Reich is an illusion.

This Memorandum, transmitted to the Supreme Council, is not received there without reservations by the British and American delegates. Not that they contest its arguments relating to the economy and defense. But they are surprised to see Benes juggling statistics that do not agree with those provided to them by their own experts. Where is the truth in all these contradictory data? Is it true that the ethnic groups are as intimately mixed as Benes claims and that the German positions there are clearly in regression? It takes all the cunning of the Czech delegates and the authority of Clemenceau to impose this text as the basis of the final settlement. Exasperated by weeks of discussion, having only a confused idea of this region of the continent where so many races, languages, and antagonistic interests confront one another, tired of searching on maps for towns of which they have never heard and which

each delegation calls by a different name, the Four Great Powers finally adopt the partition of Austria "in the indifference of a hot spring afternoon" (Nicolson).

But the news of this dismemberment, which began to filter into Central Europe in the first days of April, did not fall there in an atmosphere of indifference: it provoked a surge of indignation. And not only among the defeated, but also among certain associated countries.

[[PDF page 148]]

"How!" cried Mr. Casimir Dluski, delegate of Poland to the Peace Conference, "the Allies want to include the county of Teschen within the borders of Czechoslovakia? That is inadmissible! The old duchy of Cieszyn has always been Polish! If Mr. Benes has provided statistics to justify his theses, allow me also to make use of mine!"

And he immediately hands to the Council of Five a note from which it emerges that the population of the territory of Teschen consisted, in 1910, of 233,850 Poles, 115,604 Czechs, and 76,916 Germans, which represents the respective percentages of 59 percent, 27 percent, and 18 percent.

"These figures," Mr. Dluski continues, "apply to the four districts of Frydek, Frysztat, Bielsk, and Cieszyn (Teschen). If the district of Frydek, less purely Polish than the others on the linguistic level, is set aside, one arrives at the following proportions: Poles: 76 percent; Germans: 18 percent; Czechs: 6 percent. And this is the country that the Allies would like to hand over to the Czechoslovaks?"

There follows an exchange of sharp telegrams between Benes, Masaryk, and Paderewski. Certain members of the Polish delegation might perhaps be ready to abandon this apple of discord in exchange for a part of Prussian Silesia. But Lloyd George will not hear of it, and Pilsudski, who exercises power in Warsaw, formally opposes it.

"We will never renounce the county of Teschen!" he answers in a rough tone.

The disoriented Allies hesitate to settle the question, so much do they fear seeing this dispute degenerate into open conflict.

Meanwhile, the Austrian delegation has arrived at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where it has been parked in a hotel

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The mining district of Teschen forms part of Austrian Silesia, which Benes claimed in his Memorandum III for strategic reasons.

3. He obtained, not without difficulty, that a plebiscite be organized in Upper Silesia and begins to be annoyed by Benes's demands. "I will not be handled by these grabbers," he said one day to Philip Kerr.

[[PDF page 149]]

surrounded by barbed wire (14 May 1919). It is composed of Chancellor Renner, Deputies Gürtler and Schönbauer, and a staff of experts among whom figure the jurists Klein and Lann, the geographer Sieger, and the former president of the imperial council, Dr. Lammasch. It is accompanied, moreover, by a representative of the Sudeten Lands, Landeshauptmann Robert Freissler, and two representatives

of German Bohemia, Landeshauptmann Rudolf Lodgman von Auen and his deputy, Mr. Seliger.

On 2 June, the peace conditions are handed to the Austrian delegation. When Mr. Renner becomes acquainted with them, he protests vigorously. Mr. Balfour, who presides that day over the Inter-Allied Commission, withdraws the floor from him and informs him that the conditions of the victors are to be taken or left: they will tolerate no discussion on their subject.

Appalled, Chancellor Renner leaves the next day for Austria in order to confer with the party leaders of the National Assembly. Meeting from 3 to 6 June at Feldkirch in Vorarlberg, the Austrians undertake a first examination of the peace conditions.

“Even from the juridical point of view alone, this treaty is monstrous,” declares Chancellor Renner. “The armistice was concluded by Emperor Charles on 4 November 1918. The Austrian Federal Republic was born on the following 12 November. It has therefore never been at war with the Allies. It has repudiated all the responsibilities assumed by the Habsburg regime and disassociated itself from them to the point of changing name, motto, and flag. Our National Assembly issues from new elections. In law, there is not continuity, but rupture. The Austrian Republic is also one of the successor states of the Dual Monarchy. As such, it asks to be treated on a footing of equality with the others...”

“You will never succeed in having this point of view accepted by the Allies,” replies Mr. Gürtler. “The Italians will never let go of South Tyrol, nor the Serbs of Carniola, nor the Czechs of southern Moravia...”

“Since that is so,” another deputy suggests, “would it not be better to declare Austria politically

[[PDF page 150]]

and economically nonviable, and ask the Allies to constitute a liquidation commission, which will settle as it thinks fit all the problems resulting from the dissolution of the Empire?”

Chancellor Renner is reluctant before so radical a solution, of which he knows very well that the first victim would be the Austrian people. He implores the deputies present not to succumb to discouragement. But they cannot agree on any line of conduct. The conference separates in the greatest disorder...

The situation is already fairly anarchic in Vienna and Budapest. Since the signing of the armistice, it has only worsened. But now all Danubian Europe seems to be sliding into the abyss, for the announcement of a possible resignation of the Austrian cabinet leads everyone to want to anticipate the event by hardening his positions and taking pledges.

On two occasions, the Romanian army, crossing the armistice line, then the neutral zone separating it from Hungary, wanted to seize the Banat of Temesvar and march on Budapest. The Supreme Council had to exert strong pressure on it to bring it back within its limits. Then the Serbian army wanted to do the same in the southern provinces of Hungary. There too, the Allies had to intervene.

On 29 May, the 4th Serbian Army of General Janković crossed the Austrian border of Carinthia. Finding insufficient the Styrian district of Marburg (Maribor), which the Allies agreed to grant to Yugoslavia, it marches on Klagenfurt, which it occupies forty-eight hours later after bloody fighting.

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2. Some propose dissolving the Government and the National Assembly; others demand that the mining basin of Mährisch-Ostrau, in Austrian Silesia, from which Austria draws all its coal, be neutralized and placed under the authority of an international commission.

3. Elements of the 7th Austrian Infantry Regiment and volunteers, hastening from all sides at the appeal of General Hulgerth, work to halt the Serb advance.

[[PDF page 151]]

On 4 June, the Hungarians set themselves in motion in turn. Gathering all the forces they can mobilize, they resume their offensive toward the Carpathians, which Clemenceau had stopped by his note of 4 December. It seems that all Central Europe is on the point of exploding.

Then the president of the Supreme Council grows angry. On 7 June 1919, he addresses the following telegram to the Hungarian Government:

The Allied and Associated Governments are about to summon the Hungarian Government to Paris, before the Peace Conference, to receive communication of their views concerning the just borders of Hungary. It is at this very moment that the Hungarians launch, against the Czechoslovaks, violent and unjustified attacks and invade Slovakia.

However, the Allied and Associated Powers have already manifested their firm will to put an end to all useless hostilities, first by stopping twice the Romanian armies that had crossed the limits of the armistice, then those of the neutral zone, and preventing them from continuing their march on Budapest; then by stopping the Serbian and French armies on the Hungarian front.

In these conditions, the Government of Budapest is formally invited to put an end without delay to its attacks against the Czechoslovaks, failing which the Allied and Associated Governments are absolutely decided immediately to resort to extreme measures to force Hungary to cease hostilities and conform to the unshakable will of the Allies to make their injunctions respected.

A reply to the present telegram must be made within a period of forty-eight hours.

Signed: Clemenceau.

The Hungarians can do nothing but bow before this ultimatum. Trembling with anger, they evacuate southern Slovakia, leaving nearly 750,000 of their own in the hands of the Czechoslovaks.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. General Berthelot, whose staff has installed itself at Bucharest, has been invited “to take all necessary measures to march on Budapest with elements of Franchet d'Esperey's army, in case Hungary refuses to withdraw its troops from Slovakia.”

[[PDF page 152]]

The warning shot has been severe. But it has at least had the merit of sparing all Central Europe a series of bloody confrontations and jolts.

When Chancellor Renner returns to Saint-Germain, the Austrian delegation has lost many of its illusions. It has renounced placing the fate of the Austrian populations in the hands of the victors by giving way to a liquidation commission. It has renounced presenting the Federal Republic as a "successor State" of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But it has not renounced—far from it!—claiming the attachment of the Germans of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia.

On 15 June 1919, Dr. Renner addresses a note to the Peace Conference that is the exact opposite of Benes's Memorandum III, whose tenor neither he nor the Sudeten delegates yet know. It is all the more interesting to confront the two texts, for the Austrian Chancellor's memorandum seems to announce everything that will happen over the next twenty years:

Delegation of German Austria
Saint-Germain-en-Laye
15 June 1919.
No. 304.
To His Excellency the President
of the Peace Conference
Georges Clemenceau, Paris.

Mr. President,

I have the honor to submit to Your Excellency an attached Memorandum (Annex A), drawn up by the representatives of the German parts of Bohemia, Moravia, and Austrian Silesia, in order to establish the injustice with which three and a half million German Austrians are threatened by the peace conditions presented to German Austria.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The text of Benes's Memorandum III will not be known to the Sudeten deputies until September 1920, that is, sixteen months later. (See above, p. 138, note 1.)

[[PDF page 153]]

Concerning the future of the Germans in Bohemia and in the Sudeten regions, the Allied and Associated Powers are in the process of committing, against the population of the said territories and against all German Austrians, a flagrant injustice, as well as drawing the Czechoslovak people itself into an adventurous and catastrophic policy (sic).

By persisting in this course, the Powers would create, at the center of Europe, a focus of civil war, whose blaze might become, for the world and for its social development, much more dangerous than the continual fermentation in the Balkans was...

The wrong being done to German Austria is obvious. The extent of the territory and the number of inhabitants involved amount to more than double the territory and population of Alsace-Lorraine. Wanting to repair the wrong done to France in 1870-1871, the Allied and Associated Powers are going to create a double Alsace. At the moment when they proclaim the free right of peoples to dispose of themselves, they pronounce the death sentence of a population more numerous than those of Denmark and Norway combined. Never will the subject nation be able to tolerate this domination; never will the dominant nation succeed in mastering the task that will result from it for itself.

I believed it my duty solemnly to warn the Supreme Council of this.

Signed: Karl Renner,
President of the Delegation of German Austria.

The address of the delegates of German Bohemia and the Sudetes attached to Chancellor Renner's note begins by invoking the right of peoples to dispose of themselves—the principle placed by President Wilson at the basis of his peace program—and the passage from the speech to the American Congress in which he declared: “All well-defined national aspirations must receive the fullest satisfaction that can be accorded them, without introducing new elements of discord or perpetuating old antagonisms liable, with time, to break the peace of Europe and, consequently, of the world.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Bericht über die Tätigkeit der Deutsch-Österreichischen Delegation an der Friedenskonferenz von St-Germain, Wien, Staatsdruckerei, 1919, I, pp. 101-102. The draft reproduced in the Bericht presents slight variants compared with the original of the note handed to Clemenceau. We reproduce here the original text.

2. Speech of President Wilson to the American Congress, 8 February 1918, § 4. (See above, p. 106.) While Mr. Renner's note is addressed to Clemenceau, the appended Memorandum is drafted for the President of the United States.

[[PDF page 154]]

The document then sketches in broad strokes an ethnographic, historical, and economic picture of Bohemia “from the day when this old Germanic land was invaded by the Slavs.” It emphasizes the civilizing role played by the Germans under the princes of the Houses of Luxembourg and Habsburg, and the prodigious rise enjoyed by the country after the Battle of White Mountain. It stresses that the Germanic populations of Bohemia have always proclaimed their will to be and remain German, as shown by their participation in the National Assembly of Frankfurt in 1848, a will that they have not ceased to confirm thereafter. It denounces the arbitrary way in which the Czechs occupied the German districts after the armistice of 4 November 1918, and the police measures they took to reduce the populations to silence.

We are convinced, Mr. President, the Memorandum continues, that after having attentively studied these questions, you will refuse, in conformity with the principles stated by you, to submit 3,500,000 Germans against their will to the Czech State and to force them to struggle desperately against the foreign domination with which they are threatened. One cannot inaugurate the era of democracy in Central Europe by subjecting by force of arms a people of 3,500,000 human beings to a people of 6,300,000 inhabitants. One cannot establish a lasting peace in Europe by creating, within the new Czechoslovak State, a German irredentism whose appeals, constantly addressed to Vienna and Berlin, would endanger European peace.

The text then confirms the homogeneous character of the German districts, which makes it possible to draw a precise linguistic border between the two Slavic and Germanic communities and gives the claims of the Sudetes the character of “a well-defined national aspiration.” To finish, the appended Memorandum submits the following proposal to the Peace Conference:

That a plebiscite, carried out commune by commune, be organized in all the German territories of the

Sudetes, under the control of a neutral country, in the absence of Czech troops and according to a

[[PDF page 155]]

procedure to be fixed. It will clearly say of what State the German populations desire to form part.

Dr. Rudolf Lodgman-Auen,
Landeshauptmann of German Bohemia.

Joseph Seliger,
Deputy Landeshauptmann.

Dr. Robert Freissler,
Landeshauptmann of the Land of the Sudetes.

Count H. Oldofredi,
Representative of Southern Moravia
and of the District of Neubistritz.

Anton Klement,
Representative of the Böhmerwaldgau.

As one may well think, the demand for a plebiscite contained in this Memorandum is no better received by Benes and his collaborators than the proposal to have Austria's borders settled by an arbitration tribunal, transmitted six months earlier by the Swiss Government. But the Czechoslovak delegation is on its guard. It opposes this note with a veritable barrage and obtains from the Supreme Council that it be declared inadmissible, arguing “that the representativeness of its signatories is not only contestable, but that they do not belong to any officially recognized State.”

This failure leads Chancellor Renner to fall back on a second line of defense. Since the Four Great Powers do not wish to take account of his warnings, let them at least allow Southern Moravia and the Böhmerwaldgau to be attached to Austria. This request—modest though it is—meets with a new refusal.

On 28 June, the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, which fixes in irrevocable fashion the new borders of Germany, abolishes every hope of seeing the German districts

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Bericht..., Id., ibid. Attached to this memoir is an alphabetical list of all German communes of Bohemia.

[[PDF page 156]]

of Bohemia attached to the Reich. Since that is so, what is the use of continuing to claim for them the right to dispose of themselves? That question is surpassed. It is better to concentrate one's efforts on the fate that will be reserved for them within the Czechoslovak State.

With this intention, Dr. Renner addresses a new note to the Supreme Council on 10 July. In it he proposes that Czechoslovakia receive, from now on, a federal Constitution. Since its representatives

constantly repeat that the Republic will have a regime modeled on that of Switzerland, let them allow the different ethnic groups composing it to form cantons. Let these cantons be authorized to group themselves according to their racial affinities. Let the right to use their language in all acts of private and public life, to have their schools, their courts, and their full administrative autonomy, be solemnly recognized to them.

But this proposal knows the same fate as the preceding ones. The Supreme Council replies to Dr. Renner, through Clemenceau's pen, that “the Czechoslovak State being the heir of all the lands that formerly belonged to the Crown of Bohemia, the Allies believe that the German-language population must remain linked to the Czech population, in order to collaborate with it in the development of National Unity.” There is a cruel irony in this way of riveting to one another two communities that have hated each other for centuries.

On 20 July, the Supreme Council hands the Austrian delegation the definitive peace conditions and gives it ten days to present its written observations. This deadline is extended by seven days on 30 July.

On the morning of its expiration, Mr. Renner addresses a new letter to Clemenceau:

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The tracing of the borders corresponds exactly to the historical limits that separated, before the war, the German Empire from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with the exception of the “Hultschiner Ländchen,” a small territory of 315 km² and [OCR break in source].

2. Attached to this note is a draft federal Constitution in ten points, the full text of which can be found in Walter Schneefuss, Deutsch-Böhmen, Appendix III, pp. 171-172.

[[PDF page 157]]

Saint-Germain-en-Laye.
6 August 1919.

Mr. President,

By the note of 20 July, Your Excellency was good enough to hand me, in the name of the Supreme Council of the Allied and Associated Powers, the text of the peace conditions with Austria.

According to the text of these “conditions,” a formal refusal is opposed to the desire of the German-Austrian people to live free and united. Vast territories of northern Bohemia, the Land of the Sudetes, Bohemia and southern Moravia, Carinthia, as well as Tyrol beyond the Brenner, would have to be delivered to other States and subjected to other peoples.

The economic, political, and social reasons proving the necessity of the union of the German lands of the former Monarchy in one and the same State have been clearly established by the undersigned delegation in its previous communications. But it was in vain that we invoked the principle proclaimed by the Powers themselves as being their war aim; it was in vain that we asserted the right of peoples to dispose of their fate...

It is not for us to raise reproaches. We can only make use of the right to complain, to decline responsibility for such a decision, and to abandon its consequences to historical development.

For the delegation of German Austria.
Karl Renner, President.

Then, having relieved his conscience, Chancellor Renner takes the train for Vienna in order to submit the peace conditions to the Austrian Parliament.

When the members of the Assembly become acquainted with the clauses of the Treaty, there is, throughout the chamber, one long cry of pain. Whatever their political shade, the deputies cannot understand how the Allies could have departed so far from their previous declarations. Farewell to the promises contained in Wilson's Fourteen Points, which had made an immense shiver of hope pass over

[[PDF page 158]]

Central Europe! The deputies wonder whether they are not the victims of a dreadful misunderstanding. Were Austrian interests well defended at Saint-Germain-en-Laye? Chancellor Renner must describe to them the struggle he carried on day after day, and read to them, one after another, his protest notes, to make them finally understand that nothing could have modified the attitude of the Allies or moderated the appetite of the “successor States.”

“Could one not make a supreme appeal to Wilson?” asks a deputy.

“The Sudeten delegates have already attempted it,” replies Chancellor Renner. “It served no purpose.”

“Then could we not refuse to sign this treaty?”

“If Germany, though much stronger than little Austria, had to agree to sign the Treaty of Versailles, do you think we can reject the Treaty of Saint-Germain?”

In a few sentences, Renner paints a dramatic picture of the situation that would result. It would be purely and simply the end of Austria, for it would be delivered as prey not to the great Powers, but to the successor States. Already have not certain Czech circles, and especially Mr. Kramář, put forward the claim to cut a “corridor” across Styria and Carinthia, to allow Czechoslovakia to have an outlet on the Adriatic? If the Treaty is rejected, who will prevent the Allies from following through on this project?

The deputies are appalled by this revelation. After several days of passionate debates, they agree that they have no choice but to resign themselves to the inevitable. But before authorizing the Austrian delegation to place its signature at the bottom of the Treaty, they wish to raise one final protest. Late in the evening of 5 September, they entrust the Commission of General Policy with fixing its terms.

The heads of the different Lands constituting the Federal Republic

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. From the beginning of the war, plans of this kind, emanating from extremist Czech circles, were transmitted to Sazonov through the intermediary of the Russian consul in Prague and the Russian ambassador in Vienna.

[[PDF page 159]]

immediately meet in an office adjoining the session hall and draft the following declaration:

Vienna, 5 September 1919.

It is today that the Government and Representation of the German-Austrian people must decide whether they wish to sign the Peace Treaty imposed by the Powers of the Entente, a Treaty by which German Lands of the Sudetes, South Tyrol, and certain German territories of Carinthia, Styria, and Lower Austria would be delivered to foreign domination.

The representatives of the German Lands of the Sudetes, Tyrol, Carinthia, Styria, Upper and Lower Austria observe, in this fatal hour, that the territorial clauses of the Peace Treaty do violence to the elementary right of Nations to decide for themselves and that they gravely infringe upon the principles that served as the basis of the armistice concluded.

The National Representations therefore renew, before the whole world, their solemn protest against this peace of constraint. Unanimously, they refuse to recognize the distinction established by this Treaty between free nations and servile nations. They declare that the three and a half million Germans forced by such a Peace Treaty to submit to foreign domination will persist for all the future in affirming their right to dispose freely of themselves, a right that currently forms the only possible basis of national Constitutions.

In the name of all the Representatives of the Lands:

For German Bohemia:
Signed: Seliger,
Lodgman, Langenhan.

For Carinthia:
Dr. Lemmisch, Michael Paulitsch.

For Lower Austria:
Hauser.

For Styria:
Rintelen.

For the Lands of the Sudetes:
Freissler, Jokl.

For Tyrol:
Schraffl.

For German southern Moravia:
Oskar Teufel.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The same man who will play a leading role in the putsch that costs Chancellor Dollfuss his life. (See vol. IV, p. 432 ff.)

[[PDF page 160]]

When the session resumes, around midnight, this protest is read from the rostrum of the Assembly, where it arouses indescribable emotion. Certain deputies cover their eyes with their hands so as not to let it be seen that they are weeping. After which, a decree authorizing the Austrian delegation to sign the Peace Treaty is put to a vote. It receives the majority.

A few parliamentarians timidly try to intone the national hymn. But their song catches in their throats. The dejection is so deep that they are followed by no one. The curtain falls on an Assembly utterly disoriented, whose members disperse silently into the night.

*

On 10 September 1919, the signing session of the Treaty takes place in the great hall of the château of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Before taking up his pen, Dr. Renner raises his voice one last time. Reprising the arguments contained in his note of 15 June, he warns the Supreme Council against the tragic error it is in the process of committing. But the other delegations begin to speak all at once, so that his protest is submerged in the general hubbub. Clemenceau has to intervene to reestablish silence.

Understanding then that every effort is useless, Chancellor Renner places his signature at the bottom of the Treaty. Then, turning to Mr. Gürtler, who is beside him, he says to him in a colorless voice:

“The Allies do not know what they are doing! From this will come the next world war...”

But contrary to what is generally believed, the Treaty of Saint-Germain does not contain only clauses relating to Austria. It is accompanied by a treaty between the Czechoslovak Republic and the principal Allied and Associated Powers

[[PDF page 161]]

relating to the treatment of minorities within the new State. This document is divided into three chapters. The first (articles 1 to 9) stipulates, among other things:

Art. 2. — Czechoslovakia undertakes to grant to all its inhabitants full and complete protection of their life and liberty, without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race, or religion...

Art. 7. — ... No restriction shall be enacted against the free use by any Czechoslovak national of any language whatever, whether in private or commercial relations, or in matters of religion, press, or publication of any kind, or in public meetings.

Notwithstanding the establishment by the Czechoslovak Government of an official language, appropriate facilities shall be given to Czechoslovak nationals of a language other than Czech for the use of their language, orally or in writing, before the courts...

Chapter II relates to Ruthenia. It declares:

Art. 10. — Czechoslovakia undertakes to organize the territory of the Ruthenians south of the Carpathians, within the borders fixed by the principal Allied or Associated Powers, in the form of an

autonomous unit within the Czechoslovak State, furnished with the broadest autonomy compatible with the unity of the Czechoslovak State.

Art. 11. — The territory of the Ruthenians south of the Carpathians shall be endowed with an autonomous Diet. The said Diet shall exercise legislative power in matters of language, education, and religion, as well as for questions of local administration and for all other questions that the laws of the Czechoslovak State shall attribute to it. The Governor of the Ruthenian territories shall be appointed by the President of the Czechoslovak Republic and shall be responsible before the Ruthenian Diet.

Art. 12. — As far as possible, the officials of the Ruthenian territory shall be chosen from among the inhabitants of that territory.

Art. 13. — Czechoslovakia guarantees to the territory of the Ruthenians equitable representation in the Legislative Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic, to which this territory will send deputies. However, these deputies shall not enjoy the right to vote in the Czechoslovak Parliament when questions within the competence of the Ruthenian Diet are being debated there.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. That is, questions of language, education, religion, and local administration. The importance of this clause will not appear until later.

[[PDF page 162]]

Art. 14. — Czechoslovakia recognizes the League of Nations as arbiter in case of conflict over minority problems or in case of dispute concerning the application of the treaties.

No article of this Treaty refers to Slovakia. A fact all the more serious because Monsignor Hlinka—who did not take part in the negotiation of the Pittsburgh Treaty—came to Saint-Germain with a Slovak delegation to protest against too tight an inclusion of his compatriots in the new State. “Certainly,” he declared, “the Czechs and the Slovaks are brothers. But they do not know each other and have never yet lived together.” Germans, Hungarians, and Poles are likewise passed over in silence.

At first the Czechs showed some displeasure at what appeared to them an unjustified interference in their internal affairs. Do these requirements not risk restricting the freedom of action of the Prague Government? And then, is it necessary to formulate in writing what has already been the object of so many verbal promises?

But Philippe Berthelot points out to them that the acceptance of these clauses is the best way to dispel the uneasiness prevailing within the British delegation.

“Believe me,” he tells them in a casual tone, “a refusal on your part would be bad policy. Everything has been granted to you on the territorial level. Accept, in exchange, these minimal concessions. None of the minorities is expressly named in this treaty. The Slovaks? You will do with them what you wish. As for the Ruthenians, since the autonomy mentioned there remains subordinated to the unity of the State, it is you, in the end, who will fix its limits. If you do not undertake this commitment today, fear that more may be asked of you later...”

Benes has a fine ear. He understands what that means and follows Berthelot's advice without protest.

On 17 October 1919, the Treaty of Saint-Germain is ratified by the Austrian Parliament. On 4 June 1920, the Treaty of

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Paul Siebertz, Cia Tschechische Gefahr, p. 194. Mgr. Hlinka was rebuffed.

[[PDF page 163]]

Trianon is signed with the Hungarians. Is it peace at last? Not yet. For the quarrel opposing the Poles and the Czechs over the county of Teschen has still not found a solution. Despite their repeated efforts, the Allies have not succeeded in obtaining from Pilsudski that he renounce this territory. To Benes's great anger, he continues to claim it as an integral part of Poland.

Of all the successor countries of the Dual Monarchy, perhaps Poland is the most insatiable. It seems "that it wants to profit at once from Foch's victories over the Germans and Hindenburg's over the Russians." Not content with incorporating in the west West Prussia, Posnania, a part of Prussian Silesia, and Galicia, it also wants to recover in the east its borders of 1772 and to extend, without interruption, from the Baltic to the Black Sea. It is in vain that the Supreme Council has addressed to Pilsudski a telegram inviting him to conclude an armistice as soon as possible with the Ukrainians and threatening to suppress all aid and assistance if he continues to defy the decisions of the Conference (27 May 1919). The head of the Polish Government rejected its proposal.

But in the following spring, the situation suddenly reverses. The Ukrainian forces having dissipated like

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Mutilated in the north, south, east, and west, the new Hungarian Republic will set up along its new limits border posts representing the map of the country surrounded by a ditch of blood and bearing the significant word: "Never!"

2. Note of Mr. Paneyko, head of the Ukrainian delegation to the Peace Conference, to Georges Clemenceau, president of the Supreme Council, 22 May 1919.

3. On 2 November 1918, during the discussion of the armistice conditions, Mr. Pichon had declared: "I wish to insist that the territories evacuated by the Germans include all the territories that formed the Kingdom of Poland before the first partition of 1772." By this, Mr. Pichon implicitly attributed to Poland Podolia, Volhynia, and the Kiev region. Mr. Balfour, minister of foreign affairs of Great Britain, had sharply replied: "I listened with anxiety to Mr. Pichon's proposal. The Poland of 1772, you say, should be the Poland of 1918? That is not what we committed ourselves to. We committed ourselves to reconstitute a Poland composed only of Poles... We will therefore leave the task of studying this question to the Peace Conference." Colonel House, delegate of the United States, being of Mr. Balfour's opinion, Mr. Pichon's proposal was set aside. (Cf. Mermeix, Les Négociations secrètes et les quatre armistices, Paris, 1919, p. 247.)

4. In doing this, it risks attracting the hostility of the Romanians, who have already annexed Bessarabia and who also have designs on Odessa and the territories between the Dniester and the Bug.

5. "The so-called Polish offensive about which you ask me for explanations is in reality a counteroffensive, for it is the Ukrainian army that attacked us first. I therefore cannot provide you with

any reassurance on this subject." (Telegram from Pilsudski to Clemenceau, 4 June 1919.)

[[PDF page 164]]

a smoke screen, Poland suddenly finds itself face to face with the Russians. On 15 May 1920, seven Red armies and a cavalry corps, placed under the command of Tukhachevsky and Budenny, rush to the assault of the West. Submerged by this avalanche of more than three million men, the Polish divisions retreat precipitously. Grodno falls on 20 July; Bialystok, on the 25th. Then comes the abandonment of the Niemen line. A few more days and Poland will be swallowed up.

Pilsudski then launches a distress call to the Allies:

"Do not let us succumb! Come to our aid! The Polish army protects all Europe against the Bolshevik tide!"

At the same time, he sends Mr. Grabski, his minister of foreign affairs, to the Spa Conference to beg the Entente to send him arms and reinforcements (10 July 1920).

This is the moment Benes and Masaryk are waiting for. Since Pilsudski needs the Allies, let him begin by submitting to their conditions. Let him accept the Curzon Line as the eastern border of Poland and sign a protocol whose paragraph 3 will specify:

Poland will submit to the decisions of the Supreme Council in everything concerning eastern Galicia, Upper Silesia, and the County of Teschen.

Only after the signing of this agreement will the Allies undertake démarches in Moscow to ask the leaders of the Kremlin to suspend their offensive.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
8. They intervene so feebly that the Russians will refuse. It is difficult to explain why the Allies are so intent on preventing the Poles from pushing their eastern borders beyond the Curzon Line. Is this due to the fact that Masaryk—although not at all communist—is secretly favorable to an understanding with the Soviets? It is not impossible, for as early as 10 April 1918 he advised Wilson to come to an understanding with them. (See above, p. 61, note 2.) He supported the Legions that "liquidated" Kolchak, thus undermining at its base the resistance of the White Russians. Since then, he has never ceased advocating a rapprochement with Moscow. At his insistence, the President of the United States sent William Bullitt to Copenhagen (December-January 1919) to establish direct relations with Litvinov. The future U.S. ambassador to Paris returned delighted from his mission. He assured "that the Soviets nourished no imperialist aims and only desired that peoples have the right to dispose of themselves." Thereupon Lloyd George proposed that a Soviet delegation be invited to take part in the work of the Peace Conference, a suggestion that would certainly have been acted upon if Clemenceau had not opposed it in the most formal way.

[[PDF page 165]]

"This is shameless blackmail!" roars Pilsudski. "The Allies are stabbing Poland in the back at the very moment when she is protecting them against a Soviet invasion! No punishment will be sufficient to punish the Czechs for this felony!"

But he may rage as much as he likes: he is caught by the throat. In the situation in which he finds himself, he can only bow.

On 28 July, at the hour when the Red Armies intensify their attacks and when the east wind carries the rumble of their guns to the outskirts of Warsaw, a Polish-Czech agreement, concluded under the aegis of the Allies, settles the problem of Teschen by a Solomonic judgment. One half of the territory, that is, the agricultural districts of Bielsk and Cieszyn, remains with Poland. The other—which includes the industrial districts of Frydek and Frysztat, where 75,000 Poles nevertheless live—is attached to the Czechoslovak Republic.

Before signing the agreement, Paderewski addresses to Millerand, president of the Conference of Ambassadors, this note, which seems to echo Chancellor Renner's warnings:

28 July 1920.

Mr. President,

The decision taken by the Conference of Ambassadors digs, between the two peoples, a ditch that nothing will be able to fill. It is with unspeakable grief that I place my signature at the bottom of a document that tears from us a fragment of our people that is particularly dear to us.

Before doing so, I wish to warn you, Mr. President, that despite its sincere desire to fulfill its commitments, no Polish Government will ever succeed in convincing our people that the partition imposed on us conforms to Equity.

Paderewski.

Braced against the Vistula and engaged in a life-and-death struggle with an enemy ten times superior in number, all Poland trembles with anger on learning the blow that has just

[[PDF page 166]]

been struck against it. But for Masaryk and Benes, the annexation of the richest part of the county of Teschen marks the crowning of their work: henceforth all the borders of Czechoslovakia are fixed.

1. This partition is perhaps defensible from the ethnic point of view. However, the conditions in which it was imposed on the Poles will maintain in them a tenacious rancor. They swear to retake Teschen at the first opportunity.

[[PDF page 167]]

SECOND PART
THE ATTACHMENT OF THE SUDETES
TO THE REICH

[[PDF page 168]]

[[PDF page 169]]

VII
THE “DE-GERMANIZATION”
OF THE GERMAN DISTRICTS

Thus is born the Czechoslovak Republic, a single State covering a mosaic of nationalities. Within its borders there coexist, without mixing, 6,727,038 Czechs, 3,122,390 Germans, 2,010,295 Slovaks, 745,935 Hungarians, 459,346 Ruthenians, 180,332 Jews, 75,656 Poles, and 238,727 nationals of foreign origin. The Czechs alone do not have a majority. Czechs and Slovaks combined barely exceed two-thirds. More than a quarter of the population is resolutely hostile to the unitary structure of the new State. The experts of the Peace Conference believed they had resurrected a nation “within its historical limits.” In reality, they recreated an Austria-Hungary in miniature, with a predominant racial core and ethnic minorities, toward whom Masaryk and Benes will commit the same mistakes they never ceased reproaching the Habsburgs for.

Moreover, Czechoslovakia is born surrounded by the hatred of its neighbors: of the Austrians, who regret their compatriots of Bohemia; of the Poles, who claim the other half of the county of Teschen; of the Hungarians, who claim the southern portions of Slovakia and Ruthenia.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
4. Germans: 22.36%; Hungarians: 5.78%; Poles: 0.66%. Total: 28.74%.

5. The only difference is that this “core” was Germanic in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (35%) and that it is Slavic in the new Czechoslovak State (66%).

[[PDF page 170]]

It has been said that Czechoslovakia was an aircraft carrier. In any case, it is a ship that does not sail on calm waters. To keep it from breaking on the reefs, those who direct it choose to practice a policy of unification that recalls the worst aspects of that of Joseph II. They are led to it by the will to contain the centrifugal aspirations of all these populations that reach their arms toward their neighbors across the borders.

Then, to satisfy Czech expansionism, this “colonization in reverse” of which Benes spoke in his Memorandum to the Supreme Council and which is not a myth. The demographic push of the Germans being weaker than that of the Slavs, the latter demand more space, more land, more schools, and more houses. Their rise, which dates from the end of the nineteenth century, was checked by the war. It resumes all the more vigorously with the accession to independence. Now that they hold in their hands all the organs of power—the army, justice, the police, the economy—the Czechs would not understand not being the masters, that is, in all things, the predominant element of the country.

To satisfy this desire, Masaryk and Benes choose the strong method. This consists in applying severe measures of integration; hardening the carapace of the Czechoslovak State by covering its borders with fortifications that will make them invulnerable; constantly increasing its military potential, to transform the country little by little into an arsenal. For Czechoslovakia can survive only with the aid of France. To obtain it, it will have to make itself the auxiliary of her policy, that is, to be the vigilant guardian of the treaties and to provide her with a rear alliance against

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. The French military mission sent to Prague in December 1918, and which took part in 1919 in the

struggle against the Hungarians, will hold until January 1926 all the important command posts of the Czechoslovak Army. It will remain in Prague until the Munich Agreements.

3. “The confidence that not only the Czech leaders, but all layers of the population, accorded to the Western Powers and particularly to France,” writes Boris Celovsky, “was unlimited... They saw in France the creator and guarantor of their new State. The political ties contracted later with her appeared to them self-evident. Science, art, and education were oriented toward France. To the Czechs, France appeared as an incomparable model.” (Das Münchener Abkommen, p. 59.)

4. It is moreover in its interest to defend the status quo, for the least modification made to the treaties risks bringing about its dislocation. “Any local disturbance inflicted on peace in Central Europe,” President Hodja will say to foreign journalists in May 1937, “will disturb the peace of all Europe.” (Z dob Nasy Prvni Republiky, Prague, 1939, p. 200.) Analogous declarations will constantly return to the lips of the Czech leaders.

[[PDF page 172]]

Germany. In the ever-shifting waters of Central Europe, it will be the unshakable pillar on which France will be able to lean in order to hold the ambitions of the Reich in check.

It may perhaps be objected that the Czech leaders could have chosen another path: giving their country a federal structure similar to that of Switzerland, in accordance with the promises they made to the Allies. But that formula has neutrality as its corollary. Now Benes and his collaborators do not understand it that way. They prefer to practice a policy of power because it flatters their deepest instincts: hatred of Germanism, the desire to exercise influence over international affairs, and a pronounced taste for leading roles. They have too long been the “thinkers” of the Entente not to want to remain the tutors of Genevan Europe. So long as the system of collective security predominates, they will hold a choice place in it. When this system disintegrates, their whole policy will find itself out of alignment. Their refusal to adapt to the evolution of events will then drive them into a situation without issue. Overestimating their own means, and persisting in treating as negligible the internal contradictions undermining them, they will realize too late that their existence was assured only by external support. The day these fail them and the treaties that brought them into being collapse, they will collapse with them.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. This role had until now been reserved for Russia. But Russia being provisionally out of the game, it is entrusted to a chain of small States, of which Czechoslovakia appears as the central link.

3. It is impossible to make a federal State the active element of a coalition. If Switzerland had not adhered to strict neutrality on the international level, it would long ago have flown apart. Benes objected “that a neutral Czechoslovakia would have been rapidly drawn into the orbit of Germany.” But since Benes himself, in a lecture given at the University of Chicago in the spring of 1939 (that is, six months after Munich), blamed the Peace Treaty “for not having taken sufficient account of the Right of peoples to dispose of themselves,” his objection loses much of its value.

4. From 1918 to 1938, Benes directed the foreign policy of Czechoslovakia, both as minister of foreign affairs (1918-1935) and as head of state after Masaryk's death (1935-1938). From 18 December 1935 to 29 February 1936, the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs was administered ad interim by President Hodja. On 1 March 1936, Hodja was replaced in these functions by Kamil Krofta, one of

Benes's closest collaborators, who had long been his secretary.

[[PDF page 173]]

The evil from which the State will perish is at its very origin: in its Constitution. This was voted by show of hands on 14 November 1918 by an Assembly of unelected Czech deputies, in the absence of any representative of the national minorities. No delegate of the Germans, Hungarians, or Poles took part in it. This Constitution proclaims that the Czechoslovak Republic is a parliamentary democracy, where all power emanates from the parties. The nationalities are not mentioned there. The majority of Parliament—to which the members of the Government belong—results from the composition of the parliamentary groups. One might believe that these are the emanation of the whole nation. This is not so. Each minority chooses its candidates among its compatriots, who form as many small opposition groups. Since these, by definition, will never have the majority, the Government will necessarily be formed by representatives of the strongest nationality, that is, by the Czechs. “T. G. Masaryk, the founder of this State,” writes Boris Celovsky, “defined democracy as a regime of discussion. Certainly, there will be much discussion in Czechoslovakia. But these debates will have no influence on the final result: the governmental majority will always be right. Its replacement by the opposition—that characteristic feature of parliamentary democracy—will never be able to take place. The opposition will be condemned to play eternally the same role. The impossibility of sharing governmental responsibilities will provoke a progressive radicalization of the opposition elements, which will seek more and more support outside. The Hungarian parties will turn toward Budapest; the Polish ones, toward Warsaw; the Ger-

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. To whom a few Slovak delegates, also unelected, were added in extremis. (See above, p. 120, note 3.) No Ruthenian forms part of it. The obligation to act quickly, in order not to be forestalled by the peace negotiations, and the confused situation reigning at that moment in Austria and Hungary, moreover made a popular consultation practically impossible.

2. The opposition consists only of the unified Communist Party, certain Czech far-right groups, the Germans, the Hungarians, the Poles, and—though to a lesser extent—the Slovak People's Party of Mgr. Hlinka.

HISTORY OF THE GERMAN ARMY, V: THE TRIALS OF STRENGTH (1938)
Benoist-Méchin

English translation — Section 4 of 10
PDF pages 174–225
Translation note: rapid, accuracy-focused translation from the corrected embedded text layer. No new OCR was performed. Page markers from the source text are preserved.

[[PDF page 174]]

mans—that is, the Agrarian League, the Nationalists, the Christian Socials, the Democrats, and the German National-Socialist Workers' Party (D.N.S.A.P.)—toward Vienna, to the formations related to them; or else toward parapolitical organizations of the Reich, such as the League for Germans Abroad.” This system will give the Government great stability. But far from promoting the fusion of the ethnic

groups, it will exacerbate the hostility of the minorities toward the central government.

This evil is further aggravated by the policy of “de-Germanization” practiced by the Prague Cabinet.

The ink on the treaties is scarcely dry when Mr. Klofáč, Minister of Defense, has the Chamber adopt a veterans' statute that greatly favors the Czechs. Did he not himself declare that “the Legionaries would be the guides and educators of the nation”? Thus he grants them pensions, allowances, and advantages of every kind, while all those who served in the Imperial Army have no right to any pension and are not even authorized to wear their decorations. Considered suspect, they will have only one duty: to make themselves forgotten. And since the German regiments of Bohemia are among those that suffered the heaviest losses, whereas the Legions had relatively few, such inequality of treatment keeps alive a spirit of vindictiveness on both sides.

Then it is Mr. Rašín's turn to intervene on the financial plane.

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2. And, in Slovakia, of “de-Magyarization” with regard to the Hungarians. They react with the passion characteristic of them. Between 30 June 1920 and 1 July 1921, 28 persons are killed and 183 seriously wounded by the police. In addition, 1,482 persons are imprisoned, including 1,023 in the months of April and May 1921 alone. (Yvan de Rakowsky, declaration to the International Congress for the Defense of the Rights of Peoples, Geneva, 1–10 September 1921.)

4. On average, 30 to 40 dead per 1,000 inhabitants, with a corresponding high percentage of the sick and severely maimed.

5. The statistics drawn up at the time of the repatriation of the Siberian Legions list 3,400 dead. The low figure is explained by the fact that most Czech deserters remained prisoners until 1917 and joined the Legions only once the war was over.

6. Later, recruits from the German territories will be kept away from the principal combat arms: aviation, tanks, heavy artillery, and frontier-defense battalions (Grenzschutzbataillonen). They will be treated with a mistrust that will not disarm. Very few of them will reach the rank of officer in the active Army.

[[PDF page 175]]

As early as February 1919—that is, even before the borders of Czechoslovakia had been definitively fixed—he forbade, overnight, any movement of capital abroad. The Czech banks, warned in time, were able to repatriate their funds. But the others, not warned, and most of whose assets were blocked in Vienna, found themselves facing serious cash difficulties. In order not to have to close their counters, they turned to the Czech banks to ask them for credit. The latter granted it. But when repayment fell due, they demanded that their advances be transformed into shareholdings. By this means, the Czechs secured control of the whole banking apparatus and—by consequence—of industry.

This was a very hard blow dealt to large German capital. But small savers were treated no better. In the aftermath of the signing of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, the Czech State refused to recognize the war loans, whose amount came to seven billion crowns. The subscribers were ruined overnight. This measure struck above all the German industrialists, petty bourgeois, and civil servants, since the Czechs, for their part, had refrained from subscribing to them. Shortly afterward came a tax reform that

favored the peasants to the detriment of industry and mining, so that in 1923, 56 percent of all taxes of the Czechoslovak State would be paid by the Sudeten regions alone.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Nothing better shows the reversal of the banking situation than the following table: respective capital of the German and Czech banks, in millions of Czech crowns, by year.

[[PDF page 176]]

Little by little, the Czech State makes it a general rule not to place any armaments order with German companies that do not employ a fixed percentage of Czech labor, and demands the dismissal of all non-Czech workers belonging to the opposition parties, here described as “enemies of the State.”

In 1925, the Prague Government decides to reduce the number of civil servants. German officials are dismissed first. When, two years later, staff numbers rise again, all posts are reserved for candidates of Czech origin.

To this set of measures intended to dismantle the German positions in finance, industry, and the machinery of the State, there is added a parallel action in the agricultural sphere. The Government prescribes a vast agrarian reform under which not only are great estates to be broken up, but all lands acquired by Germans since the Battle of the White Mountain—that is, after 1620—will be expropriated and handed over to Czechs. The reform covers 1,750,000 hectares, of which only 270,000 lie in Czech territory. 750,000 hectares are in German-speaking territory and 730,000 in the part of Slovakia populated by Hungarians. The parcels resulting from the breakup of the great estates are often assigned to former Legionaries, who come to settle as farmers in zones occupied until then by minorities.

These new “colonists” are treated by the Government with particular solicitude, because it considers them the pioneers of the “Czechization” of the country. Some of them, totally incompetent in agriculture, or assigned holdings too small, find it preferable to resell their parcels to the Germans. The latter are then obliged to buy back their own lands, but at a price four or five times higher than that which the State paid them.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. On 28 January 1936, a decree of the Minister of Defense, Mr. Machnik, prescribes that only Czech and Slovak labor be employed in the armaments industry. This decree merely makes official a state of affairs that has already existed for several years.

2. Thus between 1921 and 1930, in the sectors of Justice, Railways, Posts, and Education alone, 33,058 German civil servants are dismissed and replaced by 41,314 Czech officials. (Official statistics of the Czechoslovak State.)

[[PDF page 177]]

The others, who keep their lots, are powerfully aided by the official services. The State grants them loans at a very low rate, to allow them to buy fertilizer and equipment. Czech schools are built for their children. Czech teachers are placed there, for the Czechization of the land is only a prelude to the suppression of the language. All German towns are renamed and receive Czech names.

Since German children must learn Czech by obligation—recognized as the sole official language of the

country—the State exerts all sorts of pressure to force their parents to send them to Czech schools. These are favored in many ways: subsidies, modernization of buildings, gifts of sports fields, and advantages of every kind, while the German schools, clearly disadvantaged, have great difficulty defending themselves. Parents who nevertheless refuse to send their children to Czech schools are subjected to various vexations: withdrawal of the work card, suppression of family allowances, and close surveillance by the authorities. For wherever a Czech school takes root, Czech officials and gendarmes come to settle in its wake.

The agrarian reform is followed by a nationalization of the forests. These are almost exclusively situated around the edges of the country. The forestry staff—which was composed of Germans in a proportion of 98 percent—is dismissed in the State forests and replaced by Czech personnel. Thus elements of the Slavic population infiltrate as far as the frontiers.

All these measures have the object of eliminating the German populations,

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1. It sometimes happens that Czech schools are created in purely German villages in which only a single Czech family has settled.

2. Thus Reichenberg becomes Liberec; Aussig, Ústí; Teplitz, Teplice; Saaz, Žatec; Eger, Cheb; Pilsen, Plzeň, etc. (See map, p. 167.)

3. An important item in the national budget is devoted to subsidies for these schools. It bears the title Aid to Minority Schools. The Czechoslovak delegation to the League of Nations will use this to show how much the Czech Government respects the clauses of the Treaty of Saint-Germain. In reality, it is not at all aid given to German, Polish, or Hungarian schools, but to Czech schools established in the territories of these minorities.

4. This staff, often improvised, knows its trade badly. It engages in such excessive fellings that the Prague Government must intervene to put matters in order.

5. To these one could add many others, notably the fact that in all mixed marriages the children are automatically entered as being of Czech nationality in the civil registers.

[[PDF page 178]]

whether by bringing them to integrate with the Czechs, or by forcing the irreconcilables to emigrate.

And yet, despite the constant pressure exercised by the Prague Government, the Germans defend themselves foot by foot. During the thirteen years following the signing of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, out of 3,405 Sudeten communes, only 44 show a Czech majority in the 1930 census. Even then, the Germans regain the majority in two of them during the following years.

But in what pitiful condition do they manage this! The moment when their existence seems most threatened occurs during the terrible depression of 1931–1935. As in all crises of this kind, the industrial regions are much more harshly struck than the agricultural regions. This contrast appears clearly in the unemployment figures: 29 per thousand in the Czech territories; 76 per thousand in the German territories. When some twenty Sudeten workers go as a delegation to the Ministry of Labor in Prague to request a more equitable distribution of unemployment benefits, how astonished they are to

see in the minister's office a map showing the distribution of languages in Bohemia. Examining it more closely, they realize their mistake: it is a map on which unemployment rates have been shaded. The line separating the darker regions from the lighter ones corresponds exactly to the linguistic frontier. Of 16 districts where the number of unemployed exceeds 10 percent, 15 are German. In one of them—the district of Graslitz—the figure reaches 23.6 percent, nearly a quarter of the population.

In this atmosphere of police harassment, misery, and ruin, how can one be surprised that suicides rise in terrifying proportions? There will be 20,000 for the whole country. The Czech rate of 3 suicides per 10,000 inhabitants is already very high. But what is one to say of the German districts, where it reaches 7.6 at Reichenberg, 7.9 at Dauba, 9.7 at Haida, 11.6 at Zwickau? At Auscha, out of 296 deaths, 44 are suicides, one-seventh of the total.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. The allowances granted by the Prague Government go exclusively to the Czech and Slovak districts.

[[PDF page 179]]

Parallel to this increase in the number of suicides, one notes a fall in the birth rate and an increase in mortality. When a population reaches this degree of erosion, only two exits remain to it: perish or revolt.

[[PDF page 180]]

VIII
THE REACTION OF THE SUDETENS

The first to rise up against this state of affairs is Landeshauptmann Lodgman von Auen, the man who tried in vain to obtain autonomy for the Sudetens at the Peace Conference. Descended from a family of Irish pastors who emigrated to Bohemia after having fought to make “Home Rule” triumph in their country, Rudolf Lodgman is an upright and scrupulous man, for whom the final victory of Right can admit no doubt. He tries to group the Sudetens into a single front, for he believes that this is the only way for them to impose their will on the Prague Government. But he succeeds only partially. If he obtains the support of elements of the center and the right, with which he forms a “German Parliamentary Union,” he does not manage to rally the circles of the left to himself in any lasting way. On 1 June 1920, he reads before Parliament a manifesto that will become the Charter of what will later be called the “Systematic Opposition.” He proclaims there, among other things: “None of the laws enacted by the Czechoslovak Government has binding force for us... Injustice cannot be transformed into justice, even if applied for a thousand years...

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2. Deutschparlamentarischer Verband. This cartel, whose ties were in any case rather loose, includes the German Nationals (Deutschnationale), the National Socialists (D.N.S.A.P.), the German Agrarian Party, and the German Christian Socials.

3. We have already mentioned the role played by the Social Democrats and the Communists during the elections for the Vienna Parliament in February 1919 (see above, p. 130), and during the municipal elections of 15 June 1919 (see above, p. 133). From 1920, Ludwig Czech, one of the leaders of the German Socialist Party, even accepted a place in the Government.

[[PDF page 181]]

We shall never cease to claim for our people the right to dispose of itself... The form of the Czechoslovak State and Government are problems that have not yet found their solution... These positions are irrevocable. They constitute the testament that we shall bequeath to posterity."

Such a declaration could have borne fruit only if the German deputies in the Prague Parliament had left the chamber after reading it and refused to reappear there until the Czech Government had given them satisfaction. That was too much to ask of them. At the moment when the head of the Government goes up to the tribune, Lodgman—taking up a formula once pronounced concerning the Germans by Masaryk himself: "Let the colonists and immigrants go away!"—orders the members of the Union to leave the hall. They obey him, as do the Hungarians. But it is only a gesture without consequence. A few days later the deputies return to sit.

Discouraged, Lodgman finally withdraws from political life, declaring: "Events have shown that the Sudeten people, though engaged in a struggle on which its life or death depends, has not yet understood that honesty and the courage to proclaim one's opinions openly are worth more than servility, careerism, and electoral combinations."

Electoral combinations do indeed flourish during the five years from 1924 to 1929. This is the period of Locarno, when Stresemann dominates German policy. Everyone wants to be a little Stresemann, and imagines that by "maneuvering cleverly" he will obtain the greatest concessions from the Prague Government. Split into ever more numerous small groups, the Sudetens condemn themselves to impotence. The D.N.P. and the D.N.S.A.P. certainly continue to practice an irreducible opposition, but their influence is declining, while two opposing tendencies appear and rally an increasing number of votes: a first, "moderate" one, which believes there is nothing to gain by confronting the Prague authorities head-on;

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. This manifesto is signed by fifty-four deputies and senators. (Cf. Walter Schneefuss, Deutsch-Böhmen, Appendix IV, p. 175.)

2. In 1925, Lodgman leaves Bohemia and settles in Germany where, after the Second World War, he will become the leader of the Sudetens who fled Czechoslovakia to escape Mr. Gottwald's Communist regime.

[[PDF page 182]]

a second, still more liberal, one that goes so far as to advocate close collaboration with the Czechoslovak Government. When in 1926 Mr. Anton Švehla, the new President of the Council, invites Mr. Mayr-Harting, the leader of the Christian Socials, and Mr. Spina, the spokesman of the Agrarian Party, to join Mr. Czech in his Cabinet, this tendency finally prevails over the others.

Mr. Spina believes, in fact, that systematic opposition lacks realism and can lead the Sudetens only to disaster. "What is the use of digging in our heels?" he habitually says. "It is better to look reality in the face. All power is in the hands of the Czechs. They are determined to exercise it completely. No foreign Power will come to our aid. Let us therefore avoid a confrontation in which we are defeated in advance. Let each person show flexibility and intelligence. Every individual who succeeds in improving his conditions of life in the Czechoslovak State will draw advantages from it that will add up and whose

sum will finally benefit the whole German population." Unfortunately, the future is not long in showing how fallacious this reasoning is.

For Mr. Švehla, the participation in his ministry of three representatives of the German minority is a precious advantage. It makes it possible to lead foreign opinion to believe that the Sudeten question is finally settled, that the Sudetens have reconciled themselves with the Czechoslovak Government, and that their existence within the new State no longer poses any problem. Why, under these conditions, make them the slightest concession? "The Germans may multiply professions of loyalty," he says to himself, "invoke the punctuality with which they pay their taxes, and put forward the discipline with which the young recruits from the Sudeten districts allow themselves to be incorporated into the national army; I see no reason to trust them.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
5. "Mr. Švehla, more flexible than Mr. Kramář, thought quietly what his predecessor said aloud. He nevertheless pursued the same policy of assimilation." (Cf. Schneefuss, op. cit., p. 121.)

[[PDF page 183]]

Their docility is due only to fear of the gendarmes and tax agents. True loyalism would consist in grouping around the State if it were threatened. Now, I know very well that in a crisis they would immediately join the ranks of our enemies."

The reconciliation between the two peoples will fail because a portion of each retains its old enmity for the other. On one side are the Legionaries, the Sokols, and the supporters of Kramář, who do not wish to renounce the policy of de-Germanization; on the other, the whole right wing of the opposition, the German nationalist leagues, and the activists of the National-Socialist Party, who stubbornly refuse to let themselves be "Czechized." Very quickly, the German ministers realize that they are neither numerous enough nor listened to enough to impose their views on the Cabinet; not even to obtain the few measures of appeasement that would justify their presence there.

Their situation is all the more delicate because their participation in the Government has unleashed passions within the German community. For Mr. Spina and his friends, the adherents of the "Systematic Opposition" are utopians and hotheads who sabotage every attempt at constructive policy. For the members of the D.N.P. and the D.N.S.A.P., the leaders of the Agrarian and Christian Social parties are unscrupulous opportunists, proven traitors. Thus their collaboration with the Prague Government has this paradoxical result: while in no way undermining Czech unity of action, it aggravates dissension among the Germans.

The situation of Messrs. Spina and Mayr-Harting becomes frankly bad when at the end of September 1933 the Czech Government decides to ban the German National and National-Socialist Parties, because of their collusion with the parties of the same names that have just taken power in Berlin. To forestall the government decree, the D.N.P. and the D.N.S.A.P. dissolve themselves. Their leaders, Hans Krebs and Hans Viererbl, flee to Germany, leaving their followers completely disoriented.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. On 30 January 1933, Hitler took power in Germany at the head of a coalition formed by the National-Socialist and German National parties. (See vol. III, pp. 83–84.)

[[PDF page 184]]

The repression that then falls upon a whole section of the population, the unemployment that grows dramatically, and the unexpected death of Mr. Švehla strip the German ministers of all credit. Their efforts—sincere though they were—to improve the lot of their compatriots have only piled up disappointments and ruins.

The future therefore appears in the darkest light when a man of thirty-five, until then unknown to the public, decides to resume the struggle on entirely different foundations: Konrad Henlein. On 1 October 1933, he addresses to his compatriots an appeal whose new accent strikes even the least informed ears:

To all Sudeten Germans!

All efforts attempted to this day to cement the multiple existing Sudeten parties into a single political formation have failed.

Our people is poorer by one hope. The fault lies with those for whom material advantages and electoral prebends count more than the misery of the people.

Our people has had enough of these selfish rivalries. It no longer wishes to see hatreds between parties and between peoples perpetuated. It aspires to the building of a popular community founded on the abolition of class struggle and on the peaceful coexistence of the different peoples that constitute this State.

In this hour of supreme distress, I call upon all my compatriots, without distinction of class or party, to unite in a vast movement embracing the whole of the Sudeten Germans, of which I have decided to take the lead.

This decision is not dictated to me by personal ambition, but by the love that I bear for my people and my Fatherland.

The Sudeten Homeland Front sets itself the goal of uniting all Germans who live in this State, who are fully conscious of belonging to the same popular community, and who profess the principles of Christian philosophy. It recognizes its belonging to the German community of destiny and culture. Its principal task will be to ensure the security and recovery of our common inheritance: our soil, our cultural organizations, our economy, and our right to work. It demands, in all fields, an equitable solution to social and economic problems. It considers the security of workers one of the essential conditions

[[PDF page 185]]

of the restoration and maintenance of our vital substance.

While recognizing the Czechoslovak State, the Sudeten Homeland Front will struggle to attain its objectives on the terrain that Destiny has assigned to it, by resorting to all means authorized by law. It professes the essential principles of democracy, foremost among which is the equality of peoples in respect for their own personality, and it considers the loyal application of these principles the surest guarantee of the harmonious development of the peoples of Central Europe.

The Sudeten Homeland Front will be constituted on a corporative basis, in order better to defend the

interests of all and to ensure the victory of the common good.

Workers, bourgeois, and peasants!

Close ranks! Let all your work be devoted to the salvation of our Fatherland!

Konrad Henlein.

Who, then, is this unknown man who seems to take up Lodgman's political testament on his own account, and who addresses his compatriots with an authority surprising in a man of his age?

Born on 6 May 1898 at Maffersdorf, near Reichenberg, Conrad Henlein enlisted in 1916 in the Austrian Army, where he quickly made himself noticed by his gifts of organization, his bravery, and his dynamism. Promoted officer at 18, he was taken prisoner by the Italians in 1917 and interned in a camp until the end of hostilities. After the armistice of 1918, he returned to Bohemia where, for a time, he became a bank employee at Gablonz.

Is his appeal a declaration of war on the Prague Government? Yes, in the sense that he invites all the Sudetens to unite in order to wrest autonomy from it. No, insofar as he does not dream of incorporating them into the Reich. For Henlein is not a separatist. His aim consists in restoring the position of the Sudetens inside the Czechoslovak State, whose existence and legality he otherwise recognizes. But more

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1. He would like to force the Prague Government finally to create that “ideal Switzerland” of which Benes himself spoke at the Peace Conference. (See above, p. 142.)

interesting still is the fact that, painfully conscious of the harm done to his compatriots by factional and party rivalries, he has come to the conclusion that, in order to be won, the struggle must take on a new form.

Examining the manner in which the Czechs had gone about attaining independence, he noticed that as long as they had fought on the strictly parliamentary plane, they had harvested only minor successes. Whether their deputies sat or did not sit in the Reichsrat of Vienna had hardly changed the course of events. It was only when Tyrš and Fügner had founded the Sokols that the Czech emancipation movement had acquired sufficient vigor to worry the leaders of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In his turn following the example of Jahn, and believing that what must be saved is not this or that aspect of the political spectrum but the very substance of the Sudeten people, Henlein groups around himself a number of gymnastics associations, the Sudetendeutsche Turnverbände, which grow on the margins of the parties and will serve as the springboard for the “Sudeten Homeland Front.”

From 1925, Henlein has left his bank to become a physical-culture teacher at Asch. An irreducible adversary of parliamentary liberalism, he constantly repeats to his pupils that peoples need to be led by strong men and that action prevails over ideological discussions. “It is powerful personalities, supported by the devotion of fanatical minorities, who make history,” he tells them. “We are the declared adversaries of liberalism, even camouflaged under the mask of the cult of personality... Men want to be led in a virile manner...” He complains of the fragmentation of the Sudeten political parties

and of the shortage of leaders worthy of the name. To those who ask him why he does not stand for election, he replies without hesitation: “Never shall I be a parliamentarian and I have no wish to be one. I am a man of the people and intend to remain one. It is our divisions that allow our adversaries to celebrate their finest victories... It is as vain to lament this, without doing anything to remedy it, as it is to dream or speak of a popular community without undertaking anything to realize it...”

[[PDF page 187]]

Does this mean that Henlein is fascist? No doubt. National Socialist? Certainly not. At the outset, his ideas were inspired by the doctrines of Othmar Spann, a Viennese sociologist whose thought was embodied in the Kameradschaftsbund. Spann and his disciples thought of the creation of a German State in Central Europe, universalist in tendency, inspired by the papal encyclicals Rerum Novarum and Quadragesimo anno, whose structure would be modeled on the Mussolinian corporative State. (In this respect, it is interesting to note that in Bohemia the influence of Viennese thinkers was much stronger than that of the ideologues of Munich and Berlin.)

During the summer of 1933, when Krebs and Viererbl sensed that the D.N.S.A.P. was going to be dissolved, they proposed to him that they found together a “Sudeten People's Front.” But Henlein refused, and when the National-Socialist Party was actually banned he rallied its troops to himself, but categorically repudiated its principles and its leaders. Numerous are his anti-National-Socialist and anti-separatist declarations during the period from 1925 to 1935, notably the interview granted to the Czech newspaper Večer in 1934, in which he affirms, among other things: “I have, and have never had, anything in common with Hitlerism. German National Socialism stops for us at the frontier, exactly where the Sudeten Homeland Front stops. Let it be said clearly and once for all that we despise with all our soul men such as Krebs and his like, who are nothing but deserters. A leader who flees before his responsibilities has a right only to our contempt. We shall pitilessly expel from our ranks anyone who is not loyal to the Czechoslovak State or who maintains relations with a foreign organization hostile to that State.” Such positions could not be welcomed in Berlin, where Krebs and his team had been received with open arms. No doubt the adhesion of an ever greater number of D.N.S.A.P. members

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. A partisan of a corporative and Christian State, Henlein is closer to Schuschnigg or Seyss-Inquart than to Rosenberg or Streicher.

2. Sudetendeutsche Volksfront. Bilek claims that Henlein met Krebs at Bad Elster in January 1934, but the archives of the Czech Ministry of the Interior are silent on this point. (Cf. Bilek, Fifth Column at Work, London, 1945, and Celovsky, op. cit., p. 112.)

3. That is, at a time when Hitler was already Chancellor of the Reich.

4. Večer, Prague, 4 August 1934. Cited by Franz Trubert, Die Tschechoslowakei für Europa geopfert — Vergebens!, New York, 1938, p. 32. See also České Slovo, 5 September 1938.

[[PDF page 188]]

to the Sudeten Homeland Front will finally give his movement an increasingly separatist coloring. But this would not have sufficed to alter Henlein's opinions if he had not run into a concatenation of circumstances stronger than his will and the blind obstinacy of Prague's leaders.

Curious as it may seem, it is not in Berlin but in London that the leader of the Sudeten Front will first seek external support. Invited by the Royal Institute of International Affairs to give a lecture at Chatham House, he crosses the Channel for the first time on 9 December 1935. During the adversarial debate that follows his presentation, he explains to the English that the Czechs have trampled underfoot all the commitments they contracted toward the minorities, and that they have outrageously violated the Treaty of Saint-Germain. He willingly acknowledges that the attitude of the Sudetens has contributed, in part, to poisoning relations between Prague and Berlin. But he violently attacks "the two evil forces that risk dislocating Central Europe: Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism." He affirms on his honor that he is in no way "a local agent of Hitler," that he has never yet addressed a word to any member of the National-Socialist Party, nor to any leader of the Reich, which is true at that date. He will not meet Hitler until August 1936,

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3. Boris Celovsky, op. cit., p. 105, who adds: "The victorious outcome of the war and the proclamation of independence had immeasurably increased the national selfishness of the Czechs." In reality, they want to take their revenge on the Germans.

4. It goes without saying that this attack on Pan-Germanism is very badly received in Berlin. In an editorial in the Völkischer Beobachter (the official organ of the Party), Goebbels invites Henlein "not to concern himself with foreign policy, at least where Germany is concerned, for such declarations can only arouse discontent, even taking into account the fact that their author is a novice in diplomacy." The ensuing polemic is much too sharp to suggest a concerted game.

5. Seton Watson, to whom Henlein will repeat his declarations of loyalty toward the Czechoslovak State, will consider that there is no reason to doubt his sincerity (Munich and the Dictators, p. 56; and G. E. R. Gedye, Fallen Bastions, p. 393 ff.). This opinion is shared by Schuschnigg (Ein Requiem, p. 293), who will even attempt a rapprochement with Henlein—through Guido Zernatto—in order to prevent the Anschluss.

[[PDF page 189]]

at the Berlin Olympic Games, where the latter will give him a medal of honor to reward him for his contribution to the development of athletics, and until November 1937 Hitler will mistrust him, doubtless in view of unfavorable reports presented by Krebs and his friends. It is only on 28 March 1938, that is, two weeks after the Anschluss, that Henlein will have his first official interview with the Chancellor of the Reich.

This journey to London will be followed by three others, in July 1936, October 1937, and May 1938. Henlein, whose position will have grown considerably in the interval, will be received there by many politicians, notably Churchill, Vansittart, Harold Nicolson, and Archibald Sinclair. He will depict for them in dramatic colors the measures of repression taken against the Germans by the Prague Government and warn them of the risk of explosion that may result.

If keeping his distance from Berlin and maintaining his demands within the framework of strict autonomy earned Henlein the sympathy of his English hearers, it brought him spectacular success in his own country, where he multiplied speeches and propaganda tours. In the elections of 19 May 1935, the "Sudeten Homeland Front"—which had been obliged, two weeks earlier, to change its name to that of the "Sudeten Party"—won, despite this handicap, 66.7 percent of the votes of the Germans of Bohemia, while the moderate parties fell to 9.1 percent, and the supporters of government collaboration to 24.2

percent.

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2. These men could not stand Henlein, whom they described as a “presumptuous gymnast.”

3. In September 1936, after the Olympic Games, Henlein spent eight days in Berlin, where he was received by certain influential members of the Party, notably Mr. von Tschammer und Osten, Reich Commissioner for Sports. It is not impossible that he met Hitler on that occasion, but the question of the attachment of the Sudetens cannot have been raised, for the official Reich archives make no mention of it. The interview of 28 March 1938, on the other hand, gives rise to the following remark: “The Führer appreciates the great successes won by Henlein in England and invited him to return to London as soon as possible, in order to continue working there in favor of British non-intervention in Bohemian affairs.” (Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, H, 107.)

4. The last of these, with the approval and encouragement of the head of the Third Reich, who had received Henlein a few days earlier.

5. “The Movement I direct is in no way an appendage of National Socialism or Fascism, but an authentically Sudeten phenomenon, the expression of a force that has existed for centuries.” Interview given by Henlein to O. D. Tolschus, New York Times, 19 November 1937.

[[PDF page 190]]

This unexpected success—which the elections of July 1936 will confirm—allows Henlein to take the offensive.

On 1 March 1937, a great rally of the Sudeten Party is held at Aussig. Henlein there makes known the six “Bills Guaranteeing the Protection of the People” (Volksschutzgesetze), whose ratification by the Prague Parliament he intends to obtain. Taken as a whole, these six bills amount to total autonomy and must entail a profound recasting of the structures of the State. Their reading is greeted by a storm of applause. But when the bills are submitted to Parliament, the Czech deputies reject them on the pretext that they are incompatible with the Constitution.

Fever immediately rises in the German districts. Certain political personalities, notably Mr. Milan Hodja, President of the Council, and Mr. Beran, Secretary General of the Czech Agrarian Party, point out to Benes that the situation is serious and that it would be imprudent to persist in so negative an attitude. In public, the President of the Republic pronounces a few soothing words. But in private, he maintains his point of view in its entirety:

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Sudetendeutsche Partei or S.d.P. On the pressure exerted by the Prague Government to impose this change of name, see Karl Hauptmann, Die Sudetendeutsche Presse im Befreiungskampf, Munich, 1940, p. 10 and 8.

2. After a slight recovery in the elections of 3 July 1936, this tendency will disappear completely in 1937 as a result of the conclusion of the Czecho-Soviet assistance pact of 1935, which Benes will make one of the pillars of his foreign policy.

3. See the graph opposite. The rapid rise of the Sudeten Party and the no less rapid decline of the other

German parties recall the rise of the National-Socialist Party in Germany. (See vol. III, p. 98.) The two curves are almost exactly superimposable.

5. All the more since growing agitation has seized the Hungarian districts of Slovakia, and among the Slovak population itself there reigns sharp discontent, due to the application of an integration policy that takes no account of Slovak aspirations in the linguistic and school domains. Mr. Osuský, Czechoslovak ambassador in Paris but Slovak by origin, warned Benes several times against the dangers of his excessive centralization policy.

[[PDF page 191]]

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[[PDF page 192]]

“Recognizing the slightest right of minorities as such would lead Czechoslovakia to dislocation.” Nothing will make him renounce his policy of assimilation, nor his Jacobin conception of a Republic “one and indivisible.”

“And if your intransigence ended by provoking a war between Germany and us?” someone asks him.

“There is no question of it!” Benes replies with a shrug. “Berlin has given me the most formal assurances on that point. I fear an aggression by the Reich much less than a restoration of the Habsburgs in Vienna. And even if the Reich wanted to show its teeth, it would draw back before the combined forces of France and the U.S.S.R., which are bound to us by assistance pacts and whose intervention would automatically bring about that of England.”

Yet Mr. Hodja, leader of the Agrarian Party and a realistic peasant, is far from sharing Benes's optimism. He is alarmed by the signs of disintegration that are multiplying, by the hardening of the minorities, and by the agitation growing throughout the periphery of the territory. Moreover, he has no confidence in Henlein's declarations, for he already regards him as an agent of Hitler. Rather worried, he agrees for the first time to receive him at the Hradčany. The interview takes place on 16 September 1937. Henlein begins by laying on the table the “Bills for the Protection of the People,” rejected by Parliament. He imperatively demands the right for the Sudetens to administer themselves and warns his interlocutor of the dangers involved in any delay in applying this reform. Disconcerted, Mr. Hodja confines himself to a few prudent banalities. He deplores that the Sudeten Party did not agree to collaborate with his government after the elections of 1935, “in order to contribute to the rise of our common State.” He promises, half-heartedly,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Hitler, whose whole attention is taken up by Austrian affairs and who is not in the habit of putting all his irons in the fire at once, is anxious to maintain “correct relations with Czechoslovakia.” Thus Göring, Mr. von Weizsäcker, State Secretary at the Wilhelmstrasse, and Mr. Eisenlohr, the Reich's minister plenipotentiary in Prague, multiply reassuring declarations addressed to the Czech Government. Numerous confirmations of this can be found in the Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik of this period.

2. He had refused to receive him until then, on the pretext that he was not a parliamentarian.

[[PDF page 193]]

some adjustments of detail and dismisses Henlein without having answered any of his questions. When, eight days later, Henlein asks him for a new interview, Mr. Hodja evades him under a futile pretext.

These hesitations, evasions, and negotiations that make no progress all contribute to irritating the members of the Sudeten Party, and above all the extremist elements, originating from the old D.N.S.A.P., for whom Henlein will never succeed by himself in overcoming Prague's hostility.

“It is madness,” they repeat, “to want to settle by our own means an affair so grave! We shall never manage it without an intervention by the Reich.”

For the first time, Henlein feels himself losing ground. How can the leaders in Prague not understand the situation in which their repeated refusals place him? Already there is murmuring in the ranks of the Party that he is in the process of betraying the cause of his compatriots in order to safeguard his personal position. He would only need to issue an appeal to Berlin to recover all his prestige. Yet he is reluctant to take this step. Why? Because he is still trying to settle the Sudeten problem within the framework of the Czech State and on the basis of autonomy. On the day after he has asked Berlin for help, it will be too late. Hitler will demand the attachment of the Sudetens to the Reich. This act will cause such a shock at the center of Europe that no one will be able to foresee its consequences or its end.

It is in this tense and menacing atmosphere—for fever has again risen several degrees in the German districts—that the unfortunate incident of Teplitz-Schönau breaks out (14 November 1937). As if to defy the minorities, the Czech Government has decided to proceed with municipal elections. What could be foreseen occurs: the consultation turns into a trial of strength. During a meeting held at Teplitz, Henlein's deputy, K. H. Frank, loses control of his nerves and violently attacks President Benes. The Czech police arrest him for insulting the Head of State and disperse the meeting with rifle butts. At once the whole region enters into turmoil. These abuses revive the half-dormant memory of the shootings of March 1919. People cry out

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. They had been postponed several times for fear of the disturbances they might provoke.

[[PDF page 194]]

that the Czech Government wants to sabotage the elections. The Steering Committee of the Sudeten Party thinks of using the incident “to settle accounts with Prague definitively” by asking the forces of the Reich to intervene immediately.

Henlein, who feels that the moment is not yet ripe for a solution of this kind, strives by every means to calm tempers. He succeeds only by promising to address to Benes a real ultimatum, putting him under formal notice to grant autonomy immediately to the Sudetens. To confuse the issue, certain extremist elements of the Party manage to introduce a copy of Henlein's letter into Germany. Goebbels has it published in the Reich newspapers before it has even reached the hands of its addressee. The President of the Czechoslovak Republic will not deign to answer it. But as a result, collusion between the Sudeten Party and the National-Socialist authorities appears beyond dispute. Benes and Hodja see in it confirmation of their suspicions. International opinion is stirred. As for Henlein, no one attaches the slightest weight any longer to his denials when he asserts that he has no connection with the Hitler

movement.

Placed in an inextricable situation—and too compromised to be able to turn back—there remains for him only to cross the Rubicon. On 19 November 1937, he addresses to the Führer and Chancellor of the Reich a Secret Report on German Policy in the Czechoslovak Republic, which is at once an appeal for help and an act of obedience.

I

The anti-German conception, in principle and in fact, of Czechoslovakia, and the fundamentally anti-German mentality of the Czech people, originate in:

1. The evolution of the Czech people during the prewar period and its education directed against Germany;

2. The anti-German activity of its leaders Benes and Masaryk during the war;

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. The document being about 7,000 words long, it is impossible to give here anything but excerpts from it.

3. The designation of Czechoslovakia in the Treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain as a bastion and as a base of operations of the Western Powers in the heart of German living space;

4. The conclusion of the Czecho-Soviet pact;

5. The alliance of Czechoslovakia with the powers and circles that stand above States and that are the adversaries of the Reich and National Socialism: political Catholicism and the Vatican; Jewry and Freemasonry; Bolshevism and the émigré clan.

The merciless struggle carried on by the S.d.P. for recognition of the rights of the Sudeten Germans, its struggle against the lie of a Czech national State, its methodical propaganda in this respect both in Czechoslovakia and abroad, and notably its disclosure of Benes's mendacious “Memoranda,” have demonstrated to the whole world that Czechoslovakia is anti-German by definition and vocation and that it is, by essence, a vassal State of France.

The Teplitz-Schönau incidents have brought out that:

1. the Czech Government is obliged, in order to fulfill its mission, either to “Czechoslovakize” the German racial group or to annihilate it; but since Hitler's assumption of power in Germany it has opted for the second solution;

2. the demands of the Czech groups are approved without reserve by the Czech Government;

3. the Czech regime has as its objective the systematic destruction of the economic and social life of Sudeten Germandom;

4. the cultural policy of the Czech Government forces 16,000 German children to attend only Czech schools;

5. Czech justice has become an instrument of the regime's anti-German policy of destruction;

6. since 1918, the Czechs have tried to give currency to the fiction of a “Germanizing march with mixed population” by systematically inserting Czech nationals into the blocks of German population.

The Teplitz incidents also allow us to note that the great mass of the Sudeten German population

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
3. These are almost always groups of former Legionaries or Sokols. (See above, p. 172.)

[[PDF page 196]]

itself no longer believes today in the possibility of an agreement with the Czech people within the Czech State. The following recent declarations are significant in this respect:

The president of the second largest Czech party, the Czech Social-Democratic deputy Hempel, declared that “neither the destiny of the Czechs, nor that of the Sudeten Germans, will be accomplished within the present Czech State.”

The chief of the President's Chancellery, Dr. Josef Schiessl, declared on 8 November 1937 to a delegation of Sudeten German lawyers that “the consequence of the present policy was a merciless struggle between the two camps.” “The two camps,” he added, “face each other and measure each other with their gaze... It is a knife duel... The heroic spirit of German youth must be broken at any price.”

The education and political formation of the Czechs, the systematic agitation maintained against the Reich and National Socialism, have had the result that the average Czech does not believe in an understanding with the Sudeten Germans. But every Czech who has settled in the German territory of the Sudetens and who exercises his trade there behaves not as the citizen of a democratic State, but as a pioneer of the Czech people and as the executing agent of the Germanophobia and the will to destruction that animate the Czechoslovaks. He sees in every official, indeed in every member of the S.d.P., a representative of National Socialism and an executing agent of the Reich's policy.

II

Credible information proves that Benes is resolved to settle the Sudeten question in a sense conforming to the vocation of the Czech people and State, that is, by a radical destruction of Sudeten Germandom.

The responsible leadership of the S.d.P. considers that the question of the Sudeten Germans has also entered a new phase, which requires that the foundations of its policy be subjected to thorough study and that its future political attitude be brought into harmony with the policy of the Reich. In the following lines will be found the enumeration of particular and current questions concerning the racial policy of the Sudeten Germans and that of the S.d.P., questions for which the portrayal of the situation offered in the first chapter can serve as background:

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. It will be remembered that the Czech Legionaries, advancing through Russia, continued to massacre

German and Hungarian prisoners of war even after the conclusion of the armistice of 1918, “as if they had an age-old account to settle with them.” (See above, p. 72, note 1.) Such an attitude was not made to facilitate coexistence after their repatriation to Bohemia.

2. Before November 1937, this was only partially exact; from that date, it will be strictly true.

3. Celovsky sees in this phrase the proof that this coordination did not yet exist.

[[PDF page 197]]

1. The block of the Sudeten Germans is neither a “minority” in the sense understood by the Treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain, nor a “racial group” comparable to the German groups scattered in Hungary or Romania:

a. In Czechoslovakia, which counts six nationalities, Sudeten Germandom represents one quarter of the total population and, by reason of its cultural, economic, and political patrimony, takes first rank among these nationalities;

b. Sudeten Germandom established in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia has preserved broad contacts with the German people and has remained in close connection with it;

c. Sudeten Germandom is today penetrated by the principles of National Socialism. It is organized in a National-Socialist Party based on the Führerprinzip;

d. Sudeten Germandom is conscious of its particular political mission in face of the anti-German vocation of Czechoslovakia and of the role assigned to it by the Western democracies and the Bolshevik State. It has the will to be one of the determining factors of the National-Socialist policy of the Reich.

2. The policy followed until now by the S.d.P. has made the following contribution to the reorganization of Europe in a sense conforming to National Socialism and to the policy of the Reich:

a. The S.d.P., which groups more than 600,000 adherents, has become, by the very fact of the struggle it conducts, the striking proof of the iniquity of the Treaty of Versailles;

b. The S.d.P., by its numerical strength alone, has refuted the thesis of the political consolidation of a Czech State;

c. The S.d.P. has engaged Sudeten Germandom in the struggle against the anti-German foreign policy of Czechoslovakia;

d. The S.d.P. has risen up against Bolshevism;

e. The S.d.P., by its political activity, has avoided the danger of a “Czechoslovakization” of the Sudetens and has inculcated in this group the principles of National Socialism;

f. In the face of the opinion of the “democratic” world, the S.d.P.

[[PDF page 198]]

furnishes the proof that the National-Socialist Order corresponds to the intimate nature of the German people, for this Order was created among the Sudeten Germans not only in full independence, but despite the pressure of the Czech State.

3. The S.d.P. is obliged to camouflage its faith in National Socialism as a conception of life and as a political principle. As a party included in the democratic-parliamentary system of Czechoslovakia, it has had to use democratic-parliamentary terminology and methods in its external manifestations, in its oral and written declarations, in its demonstrations and in the press, in Parliament, in its own structure, and in the organization of Sudeten Germandom. That is why it may appear ambiguous and untrustworthy to certain uninformed circles of the Reich. But this ambiguity is inevitable so long as the necessity remains for it to be a legal party, for the existence of such a party in Czechoslovakia presupposes adherence to democratic principles.

The apparent lack of unity of the S.d.P. is further accentuated by the fact that the Party aspires to nothing less than the incorporation into the Reich of the territory of the Sudeten Germans, and even of the whole territories comprising Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia; but that, vis-à-vis the outside, it must declare itself a supporter of maintaining Czechoslovakia and the integrity of its frontiers, and strive, for the needs of its political struggle, to make people believe in the reality of the aims it displays internally.

Although the leadership of the S.d.P. understood from the beginning, in view of the sum of experiences accumulated by Sudeten Germandom in the course of its history, that an understanding between Czechs and Germans is impossible in Czechoslovakia, it was necessary that the first major demonstration of the S.d.P. at Böhmisch-Leipa in 1934 be placed officially under the sign of understanding, and that in 1937 the so-called “Minority Protection” laws be introduced in order apparently to satisfy the demand for autonomy of the Sudeten Germans. This was the only way to put the Czechs in the wrong in the eyes of the world

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2. “In this text,” writes Laffan, “Henlein boasts of his own duplicity.” (The Crisis over Czechoslovakia, p. 49.) In reality, it is enough to place this document back in the context of the moment to see that it is a long pro domo plea in which Henlein strives to convince Hitler of his perfect National-Socialist orthodoxy. Reduced to its simplest expression, this report means: “Come to our aid; trust me and do not rely either on appearances or on what others will tell you.”

3. The Volksschutzgesetze of 1 March 1937. (See above, p. 186.)

[[PDF page 199]]

and to initiate propaganda in favor of the question of the Sudeten Germans with the Powers guaranteeing the Treaty of Saint-Germain on minorities and, above all, with England. It is in the same spirit that the complaint of the Sudeten Germans against the “Machnik decree” was lodged with the League of Nations, a complaint that had the aim of revealing the League's failure in the settlement of problems concerning minorities.

But the S.d.P. realizes today that, because of the evolution described in the first part of this exposition, it is becoming more and more difficult for it to define a domestic-policy program that is realistic, executable in the eyes of serious foreign observers and, a fortiori, in those of the supporters of the Sudeten Germans. In reality, it has become absurd to demand autonomy for the German territory of the

Sudetens, precisely because this territory has become the rampart and fortified belt of the Czechoslovak State. If this concrete wall, erected in German territory, must continue to exist as an intangible fact in the mind of European opinion, it becomes all the more difficult for the Party to continue, in its propaganda, to demand autonomy.

In conclusion, any policy in favor of Sudeten Germandom presupposes:

1. The subordination of the whole set of Sudeten German associations to the political leadership of the racial group;

2. The unity of the racial group can be ensured only by the S.d.P. and only under the leadership of Konrad Henlein.

III

The exposition of the situation and of the political problem of Sudeten Germandom and of the S.d.P. has the purpose of demonstrating:

1. The burning topicality of the question of the Sudeten Germans;

2. The necessity of dissociating the question of the Sudeten Germans from the general German racial problem;

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3. By belatedly rallying to the thesis of attaching the Sudetens to the Reich—which Krebs and the N.D.S.A.P. had advocated for a long time—Henlein fears that his earlier positions will put him in bad standing in the eyes of the Berlin leaders and prompt them to set him aside in favor of his rivals.

[[PDF page 200]]

3. The urgent necessity of a discussion between the leaders of the Reich and the leaders of the groups of the German race on the fundamental principles of the future policy of the S.d.P.

The present report will be completed by particular accounts.

This text marks a decisive turning point in German-Sudeten relations. From this moment, one may say that the supporters of attachment to the Reich have prevailed over the adherents of internal autonomy.

On 8 February 1938, when the emotion caused by the Teplitz incident has somewhat subsided, Benes and Hodja address letters to the leaders of the three German parties that have agreed to participate in the Government, in order to renew their collaboration contract and announce to them that they are prepared to make them some concessions in the linguistic and cultural sphere. But on this occasion they repeat, with inopportune stiffness, their formal will to recognize neither the principle of nationalities nor that of autonomy, and to adhere strictly to the proportionality of parties. The Sudeten Party rejects this proposal and points out, in angry terms, the abyss separating its program from the little that the Czech Government is ready to concede.

Frightened by the passionate tone this polemic has taken,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Secret Archives of the Wilhelmstrasse, II, pp. 32–46. “A close analysis of this document,” writes Boris Celovsky, “brings out a certain number of points: Henlein presses Hitler to intervene in the Sudeten question; he takes great pains to persuade Hitler that the Sudeten Party has become National-Socialist and that the policy followed until now by this movement is—from the outside—a camouflage of its true state of mind. It is permissible to deduce from this: 1. that in November 1937 Hitler was not yet convinced that Henlein could be trusted; 2. that Henlein was not informed of Hitler's intentions concerning Czechoslovakia. This also means that cooperation between Henlein on the one hand, and Hitler or his services on the other, had existed only for a short time or was not very advanced.” (Das Münchener Abkommen, pp. 116–117.)

2. In other words, the militants of the old D.N.S.A.P. who infiltrated the Sudeten Party had, with the help of circumstances, rallied the whole movement to their views.

3. That is, Mr. Spina (leader of the German Agrarian Party), Mr. Mayr-Harting (leader of the Christian Social Party), and Mr. Czech (leader of the German Social Democrats).

4. Letters of 18 February 1938, published in the Frankfurter Zeitung of 20 February 1938.

[[PDF page 201]]

Mr. Beran, Secretary General of the powerful Czech Agrarian Party, publishes a letter advocating “a more understanding attitude toward the Sudeten Party.” Then it is the turn of the Czech Social Democrats to unleash themselves. The gulf separating the two communities grows wider and wider.

Meanwhile, the German population is becoming nervous. Spontaneous demonstrations take place at Eger, Reichenberg, Aussig, and Komotau to demand autonomy, but also to protest unemployment and misery. The Czech police intervene and beat the crowd. About twenty persons are wounded. Searches take place at Party offices. About fifty activists, in whose homes weapons have been found, are brought before the courts on charges of undermining the security of the State.

Henlein no longer knows what to do. Should he grasp the hand extended to him by Beran and preach conciliation? Or should he refuse it and invite his troops to pass to armed insurrection? He goes on 19 February to Mr. Eisenlohr, the Reich minister in Prague, to ask his advice. Before making a decision, he would at least like to be fixed on Berlin's intentions.

He will not take long to be. For the next day, 20 February, Hitler mounts the tribune of the Reichstag to deliver a speech that bursts over Europe like a clap of thunder:

“Ten million Germans,” he declares, “live in two of the States bordering our frontiers. Until 1866 they were united by a bond of public law to the whole German people.

“From 1914 to 1918, they fought side by side with German soldiers. Against their will, the peace treaties prevented them from uniting with the Reich. This fact alone is sufficiently painful. But there is one point on which no doubt must remain: this separation, imposed by international law, cannot deprive these populations of the rights resulting from their racial belonging. By this I mean that the sacred Right of peoples to dispose of themselves, solemnly guaranteed to us by President Wilson's Fourteen Points as a preliminary condition to the conclusion of the armistice,

[[PDF page 202]]

cannot be regarded as nonexistent simply because Germans are involved.

“So long as Germany was powerless and defenseless, she had to tolerate multitudes of Germans being molested on her borders. But just as England makes her interests respected throughout the world, Germany today will know how to defend and make respected her own.

“In the first rank of the interests of the German Reich must be placed the protection of its compatriots who, living beyond its frontiers, cannot secure for themselves the human, political, and ideological liberty to which they have a right...”

This speech unleashes a real panic in Prague. “Ten million Germans live in two of the States that border our frontiers!” No one can be mistaken about it. Beyond Austria, which has only six and a half million inhabitants, these words directly target Czechoslovakia. The Czech Chamber and Senate are immediately convened. They meet on 4 March in plenary session to hear a speech by President Hodja. Replying to Hitler's words, the head of the Czechoslovak Government proclaims:

“For Czechoslovakia, it goes without saying—and I am fully conscious of the scope of this declaration—that its frontiers are, and shall remain, intangible!”

The emotion is so intense in Czech ruling circles that Benes also feels obliged to take a position toward Hitler's affirmations. Finding Mr. Hodja's reply insufficiently energetic, he declares the day after next to the correspondent of the Sunday Times:

“We categorically deny to any State, whatever it may be, the right to interfere in the domestic affairs of Czechoslovakia... We are resolved to defend our democratic ideals—ideals shared by Paris, London, and Washington—as well as the integrity of our territory, even, if need be, arms in hand!”

[[PDF page 203]]

The appeal to the Western democracies is clearly formulated there, and the creation of an ideological front is closely associated with the defense of territory. From now on, the Czechoslovak crisis is open. By his declaration, Benes has moved it from the domestic plane to the international plane.

It will not, however, break out immediately, for Hitler first wants to settle Austria's fate. It is against Vienna that he will first launch his armored columns. But the crisis is nonetheless there: latent, enormous, and all the more dangerous because the balance of forces in Europe has been completely reversed since the signing of the Peace Treaty.

[[PDF page 204]]

IX
THE EUROPE OF VERSAILLES DISINTEGRATES

A little less than twenty years have passed since the radiant December morning when the Czech peasants danced around their century-old linden trees and when Masaryk, landing in Prague amid the acclamations of his compatriots, wiped his misted lorgnon to hide his emotion—twenty years during which the situation of the forces in Europe has undergone a profound transformation.

In 1919, Germany is prostrate. The Austro-Hungarian Empire no longer exists. Russia is struggling in the agonies of civil war. England has withdrawn into herself. Her armies have returned to India, Canada, and Australia. America has retired to the other side of the ocean. France is therefore the only Power exercising a predominant influence on the continent. Upon her falls the heavy burden of enforcing the peace treaties.

Can she do so, reduced to her own forces, after the terrible bleeding she has just suffered? That seems unlikely. On 28 June 1919, she signed assistance treaties with Great Britain and the United States intended to protect her against a new German aggression. But the American Senate refused to ratify them. England becomes insular again; America isolationist. France is therefore forced to seek reinforcement allies on the continent. For this purpose she turns toward the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that she helped to attain independence: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia. She strives to make of them a dike capable of opposing both the tide of Bolshevism and the resurgence of the Reich, without paying too much attention to the fact that all the frontiers fixed by the Peace Treaties remain contested.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Disappointed by the turn taken by the Paris Conference, America will suddenly remember Washington's testament recommending that she not involve herself in European affairs (no entanglements...).

[[PDF page 205]]

At that time, moreover, these antagonisms are pushed into the background. The obligation for these different countries to sit side by side at Geneva after the terrible trials they have just undergone inclines some to moderation and others to silence.

Conceived originally as an international tribunal charged with arbitrating disputes that might arise among its members, the League of Nations quickly became a tribune where the representatives of the victorious countries, fixed in ideology and illusionism, pose as vigilant guardians of the status quo. During its twenty years of existence, it systematically rejected all proposals tending to make the slightest modification to the treaties. Unfortunately, its creators endowed it with no force enabling it to have its decisions respected. It is for the States that compose it to do so in its place. Hence their propensity to conclude a series of pacts which, under the name of “collective security,” are in reality intended to strengthen their own position.

The first treaty of this kind concluded by France after the war is a defensive pact with Poland, accompanied by a secret military convention (1921). While the pact alludes to a possible aggressor who is not expressly named, the Convention provides for mutual assistance in the event that Poland is attacked by Germany, and French assistance in the event that she is attacked by the U.S.S.R. Its value is increased, and not diminished, by the fact that no reference is found there to the League of Nations.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Poland is on bad terms with Germany because of Danzig, the “Corridor,” and Upper Silesia; with Russia because of the Treaty of Riga; with Lithuania because of Vilna; with Czechoslovakia because of the county of Teschen; and with the Ukrainians because of Eastern Galicia. Romania is on bad terms with Russia because of Bessarabia and Bukovina; with Hungary because of Transylvania; with Bulgaria because of Dobruja. Yugoslavia is on bad terms with Austria because of Carinthia; with Italy

because of Fiume and Dalmatia; with Hungary because of its northern frontier. As for Czechoslovakia, there is no need to return to its causes of conflict with Hungary and Poland.

2. “That the Treaty of Versailles contained no clause allowing revision by negotiation was a gap of incalculable scope,” Sir Nevile Henderson will write in his memoirs. (Water under the Bridges, p. 320.)

3. The only weapon at its disposal is “collective excommunication.”

[[PDF page 206]]

Three years later, on 25 January 1924, France signs a treaty of friendship with Czechoslovakia, to which the accompanying secret notes give the character of a military alliance.

At the end of the negotiations of the Locarno Conference, Briand would very much have liked to extend the guarantees of the Pact to his eastern allies, Poland and Czechoslovakia. But England, Germany, and Italy formally refuse this. France therefore, acting on her own account, confirms her pact with Poland and signs a new treaty with Czechoslovakia (16 October 1925). This treaty is not an integral part of the Treaty of Locarno. It is simply annexed to the Final Protocol of the Conference and communicated, as such, to all the countries that signed it.

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3. Secret notes of 26 and 31 January 1924 exchanged by the foreign ministers of the two countries concerning military cooperation. General Gamelin summarizes their content as follows: “These notes specify that the General Staffs of the two countries will continue to collaborate, both with regard to the establishment of concerted plans to meet an aggression directed against one of the two countries by a common enemy, and with regard to the study of the respective means of assistance in the event that their common interests were threatened.” (Gamelin, Servir, II, p. 469.)

4. Germany will be content to sign an arbitration protocol with Czechoslovakia.

5. Article 1: “In the event that Czechoslovakia or France should suffer from a breach of the commitments entered into this day between them and Germany for the maintenance of general peace, France and, reciprocally, Czechoslovakia, acting in application of Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, undertake to lend each other immediate aid and assistance if such a breach is accompanied by a resort to arms that has not been provoked. In the event that the Council of the League of Nations, ruling on a question brought before it in accordance with the said commitments, could not succeed in having its report accepted by all its members other than the representatives of the Parties to the dispute, and in the event that Czechoslovakia or France were attacked without having provoked it, France, or reciprocally Czechoslovakia, acting in application of Article 15, paragraph 7, of the Covenant of the League of Nations, would lend it immediate aid and assistance.”

[[PDF page 207]]

The following year (1926), France concludes a treaty of friendship with Romania which, unlike the Franco-Czech and Franco-Polish pacts, is closely linked to the Geneva procedures. A military convention is also annexed to it. But it is drafted in very vague terms and confines itself to generalities. Finally, in 1927, France concluded a non-aggression pact with Yugoslavia.

Thus were born successively the “Little Entente,” intended to block German, Hungarian, and Italian

revisionism, and the “Balkan Entente,” intended to contain Hungarian and Bulgarian revisionism.

Despite appearances, these structures are fragile. Certainly, the members of these organizations—with the exception of Poland—do not nourish any territorial ambition. But several of them are at daggers drawn and will go so far as to contract engagements with countries outside the system, indeed with States openly hostile to it. Moreover, the fact that, of all these partners, only France and Czechoslovakia are parliamentary democracies contributes in no way to “democratizing” the continent, as Masaryk and Clemenceau had hoped. It represents rather a factor of weakening and rupture, for it adds ideological disputes to territorial conflicts.

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4. Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia. It begins with the Treaty of Belgrade, concluded on 14 August 1920 between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. This is followed, on 23 April 1921, by a treaty between Czechoslovakia and Romania, itself completed, on 7 June 1921, by a treaty between Romania and Yugoslavia. The first three-party pact is signed on 3 August 1922. The alliance is renewed on 21 May 1929.

5. Greece, Turkey, Romania, Yugoslavia. The Balkan Entente was founded on 9 February 1934.

6. General Gamelin is doubtless not wrong in speaking of the “jumble of Conventions that proliferated from 1919 onward and led to no reality.” (Servir, II, p. 465.)

7. This will be the case with the non-aggression pact concluded between the Reich and Poland on 26 January 1934. Moreover, all these treaties are dangerously entangled. France and Czechoslovakia will sign assistance pacts with the U.S.S.R. while Poland and Romania already have an assistance pact against Russia. Finally, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia are allied not against Germany, but against Hungary.

[[PDF page 208]]

How can one be surprised, under these conditions, if the champions of revisionism soon find themselves in a better posture than the supporters of the state of affairs produced by the Treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain?

As long as Germany is powerless and disarmed, the balance is maintained—more or less. But with her recovery, difficulties begin. The spring of 1934 marks a crucial turning point.

Until then—and despite her clandestine rearmament—the Reich officially possesses only an army of 100,000 men. But Hitler, who has sworn to break the chains of the Treaty of Versailles, does not see matters this way. By a memorandum dated 18 December 1933, he informs London and Paris that he proposes “to transform the professional Reichswehr into an army of 300,000 men serving short terms and equipped with defensive weapons, which will be delivered to it as its transformation proceeds.”

On 22 March, having received no reply, he publishes the Reich military budget for the 1934–1935 fiscal year. Special expenditures are provided for the increase of Reichswehr strength, the renovation of naval matériel, and the beginning of the construction of an air fleet.

When Barthou protests that this is inadmissible, Lord Tyrrell, the British ambassador, comes to see him and asks him not to make precipitate decisions that would compromise the efforts of conciliation

pursued by the British Cabinet.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Romania and Yugoslavia are hereditary monarchies. Austria with Dollfuss, Hungary with Horthy and Gömbös, Poland with Piłsudski and Beck, are moving toward dictatorship.

2. Benes's pro-Soviet tendencies worry all his neighbors. They will soon see in him the forerunner of communism in Europe. And it is a fact that since 1920 the heads of the Czechoslovak State have not ceased working for a rapprochement with Moscow.

[[PDF page 209]]

“The viewpoints of London, Rome, and Berlin have drawn much closer during these last weeks,” he tells him. “His Majesty's Government is not far from thinking that a general Convention on the limitation of armaments may soon be envisaged.”

London believes, in fact, that Germany will rearm whatever happens. Is it not better, under these conditions, that she do so under control and within the limits of a Convention accepted by both sides?

On 6 April 1934, an extraordinary Council of Ministers meets at the Élysée under the presidency of Albert Lebrun. Barthou places two bundles of documents on the table. The first is the file of acceptance, the second that of refusal. In a grave voice, the French Foreign Minister explains the situation to his colleagues:

“We have reached the crossroads. Germany is preparing to tear up the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. She is going to equip herself with cruisers, bombers, heavy artillery, and tanks. The English are pressing us to give our consent by concluding with Germany a general Convention that will keep her rearmament within certain limits. Two paths are open to us. Accept: in that case, the whole foreign policy we have followed since 1919 must be revised. Refuse: in that case, we must strengthen our alliances.”

“We have a treaty of non-aggression with the U.S.S.R.,” Mr. Herriot observes. “I signed it on 29 November 1932 with Mr. Dovgalevsky. Concluded for a period of two years, it expires on 29 November next. Why not replace it with a pact of friendship and assistance containing, on both sides, more precise commitments? Why not bring the U.S.S.R. into the Geneva Assembly and bind it to the Little Entente, to constitute a bloc strong enough to make Hitler reflect?

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. The U.S.S.R. ambassador in Paris. This treaty was concluded on the margins of the League of Nations, for the U.S.S.R. was not yet a member. It will enter only on 17 November 1934, seven months later. (See vol. III, pp. 270–273.)

[[PDF page 210]]

I am sure Mr. Benes would ask nothing better. Backed by the Red Army, Czechoslovakia would be invincible...”

“No doubt,” replies Marquet. “But where will the Russians pass in order to help her? Czechoslovakia and Russia do not have a common frontier.”

Herriot appears to fall from the clouds on hearing these words.

“What are you telling me? No common frontier?”

Since the mayor of Lyon refuses to believe it, Mr. Mallarmé, Minister of P.T.T., goes to fetch an atlas. Herriot must then note that Marquet is right. To go to Prague's aid, the Red Army will have to cross either Poland or Romania, or both at once. Even overflight by aviation presupposes the prior consent of Warsaw and Bucharest. A confused discussion follows, in which each advances the most contradictory arguments. Barthou, as for himself, would lean rather toward acceptance. But Doumergue, Pétain, Tardieu, Herriot, and Laval are against it: Pétain so as not to dissociate himself from the Army; Tardieu through nationalism; Herriot through antifascism and Russophilia; Laval to ward off the specter of a new European conflict.

Exceptionally, the Council of Ministers is invited to vote. The thesis of refusal prevails. On 17 April, Barthou addresses a note to England that Viénot will call “a refusal to consider and a blow with a club.” It brings the negotiations to a brutal end and chills relations between London and Paris.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. As regards Laval, the testimonies are contradictory. According to Louis Lamoureux, Laval, annoyed by a phrase of Doumergue—“France will watch alone over her security”—was for acceptance. (Mallet, op. cit., p. 56.) According to Marquet, he was against it, “out of concern for peace.”

3. On 14 April, General Weygand addressed to the Government a note in which he took a clear position against acceptance. (Commission d'enquête, VI, p. 1595.) There is no doubt that the French General Staff also exerted strong pressure in favor of rejection. (Cf. Georges Castellane, Le Réarmement clandestin du Reich, p. 517.)

4. Marked from the beginning of his career by the Stockholm Congress, Laval never believed in the virtue of wars for resolving conflicts between States. Moreover, according to the formula he will state later, he wants “to make the chain around Germany” in order to contain her within her limits and prevent her from launching into an adventure that will set the continent on fire. (Declarations of Laval of 16 March 1939 and 14 March 1940.)

5. The note of 17 April is entirely from Barthou's pen. It seems he regretted it afterward, as his wavering at the Geneva Assembly shows. Daladier too will consider it an error.

6. France's refusal to continue the negotiations in favor of a general Convention on the limitation of armaments will make a deplorable impression in London. Sir Samuel Hoare will see in it “a short-sighted policy,” Lord Lothian “a no of historically fatal scope.” But perhaps it is Lloyd George who expresses most clearly the feeling of the average Englishman: “The signatories of the Treaty of Versailles,” he will say on 29 November 1934 in the House of Commons, “solemnly promised the Germans that they would disarm if Germany took the lead. For fourteen years Germany waited for the victors to keep their promise. During this time, a series of ministers deeply devoted to peace exercised power in Germany, ministers who never ceased begging the great Powers at last to keep their word. They were mocked by the conclusion of a series of pacts directed against their country. During that same period, all countries—except England—increased their armaments and granted loans to Germany's neighbors to enable them to reinforce their military potential. Should we be astonished, after that, if the Germans resorted to revolution and rose up against this chronic deception by the great

Powers? England will never impose disarmament in Europe so long as this state of affairs subsists... That France does not understand this does not oblige us to follow her on a path that risks leading us to a new world conflict."

[[PDF page 211]]

For France, nothing remains but to rearm and reinforce her eastern alliances. Barthou has devised for this an ambitious plan: it consists in associating Russia with the collective-security system, bringing Poland into the Little Entente, and ensuring the inviolability of Poland and Czechoslovakia by a double guarantee from Germany and the U.S.S.R.

He immediately sets out to tour the capitals. On 20 April 1934, he goes to Prague and Warsaw. Benes receives his project very eagerly. Already won over to the idea of an alliance with Russia, he sees only advantages in the project of an "Eastern Locarno." But in Warsaw, they show infinitely more reserve. The Polish Government has just signed, three months earlier, on 26 January 1934, a non-aggression pact with the Reich that shelters Danzig and West Prussia from a coup de force. It therefore does not want to do anything that might displease Berlin. Come to an understanding with Czechoslovakia? There can be no question of it so long as the question of Teschen remains.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. By an incomprehensible aberration, at the same moment government decrees reduce our military expenditures by 20 percent.

In addition, Sir Nevile Henderson will write in his memoirs: "The Allied Powers, under Lord Curzon's direction, were wise enough, during the Conference held at Lausanne in 1922–1923, to revise the Treaty of Sèvres concluded with Turkey. Unfortunately, they did not have the courage to do as much with regard to Germany. They preferred to let themselves be imposed upon, one after the other, by a series of unilateral revisions of the clauses of the Peace Treaty." (Water under the Bridges, p. 320.)

[[PDF page 212]]

Ally with Russia? The Warsaw Government thinks still less of that.

"There is much talk of European solidarity, but I seek it in vain," Piłsudski had said in 1920. When he had defended his capital against the assaults of the Red Army, the Allies had ordered him to renounce all territories situated east of the Curzon Line. Thanks to the victory he had won over Tukhachevsky's divisions, the former chief of the Polish Military Organization had succeeded in keeping them. This success had not been due to the support of the Allies, but to the courage of his Legionaries. With rage in its heart, Russia bowed before the verdict of arms. But it nonetheless continues to claim these territories as forming an integral part of the U.S.S.R. Thus Marshal Piłsudski and Colonel Beck, his Foreign Minister, cannot believe their ears when they hear Barthou proposing that they conclude a pact with Moscow "to ensure the inviolability of their frontiers," so convinced are they that once Soviet armies have entered Poland they will not leave.

The same sound comes from Romania. Taking advantage of the chaotic events of 1919–1921, Romania annexed Bessarabia, which Moscow claims from her as belonging to Ukraine. To allow Russian troops to cross the Dniester would amount to accepting the dismemberment of the country. Can such a sacrifice be asked of her solely to ensure Czechoslovakia's security? The Romanian Government may well maintain good relations with Prague, but it has no intention of going that far.

Disappointed by this double failure, but by no means discouraged, Barthou takes up his pilgrim's staff again and leaves on 20 June 1934 for a second journey in Central Europe. Its result is hardly more encouraging than the first. Meanwhile, Germany makes known that it does not intend to sign any treaty obliging it to lend assistance to the U.S.S.R. or to defend the Soviet regime if it were attacked. Three days later, on 13 September, the Quai d'Orsay receives an equally negative reply from Poland,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Thus was born the Treaty of Riga (18 March 1921). (See vol. IV, pp. 236–237.)

2. The Polish Government does not categorically oppose Barthou's project. But it subordinates Poland's possible adherence to the Eastern Pact to so many restrictive clauses that this amounts to a refusal. (Carl Burckhardt, Ma Mission à Dantzig, p. 22.)

[[PDF page 213]]

which declines the perilous honor of allowing a foreign army to cross its territory under any pretext whatsoever. All the antagonisms that France believed she had exorcised by the Treaty of Versailles emerge again from this Pandora's box as soon as the lid is lifted. The “Eastern Locarno” collapses before it has even been born.

Barthou's policy leads to an impasse. But the French Foreign Minister will not have time to draw the conclusions from it, for he will be assassinated at Marseille on 9 October 1934 while going there to welcome King Alexander II of Yugoslavia.

The first words of Pierre Laval, who succeeds him at the Quai d'Orsay, are to announce that he will continue his predecessor's policy. But he conceives it rather differently. No more “Eastern Locarno”: the project was too ambitious. “Let us be more modest,” he says to himself. “The Russian alliance is indispensable to us: let us begin by signing it, without troubling ourselves about the objections of the Little Entente. Once the act is accomplished, we shall certainly find a way of associating our other allies with it.” He counts on his gifts of persuasion to convince Colonel Beck, on King Carol's authority and Titulescu's skill to overcome Romanian opposition.

But will Russia accept entering into this combination? Assuredly. Stalin has for some time lived in dread of a double peril: in Europe, German aggression; in Asia, Japanese aggression. The need to fight a war on two fronts obsesses him night and day. To loosen this grip, only one solution is imperative: throw Japan back toward the Pacific by increasing tension between Tokyo and Washington; throw Germany back toward the west by poisoning its relations with the Western democracies.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. The Germans observe, with more irony than anxiety, the circuit of “this stooped little man who runs from capital to capital to tighten the bars of their cage and place locks everywhere”—locks that they are convinced they can easily blow open. Poland's attitude is a first indication. Others will follow.

3. His anxiety is further increased by the rapprochement beginning between Germany and Japan, which will soon lead to the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact (25 November 1936). (See vol. III, p. 78.)

[[PDF page 214]]

This is what General Schweisguth saw very well during the information mission he carried out in Moscow. “Russia seeks to throw westward a storm that it feels rising in the east,” he writes in a report to the French Government. “It does not want to be involved in the next European conflagration and would greatly prefer the storm to break upon France. A war between France and Germany would not only have the advantage of leaving, for lack of common frontiers, almost all Soviet forces outside the conflict, but also of making the U.S.S.R., like the United States in 1918, the arbiter of a Europe exhausted by a struggle that Marshal Voroshilov foresees as merciless.”

But to be able to play this role, the Soviets must exert an influence on the course of events. This is why the U.S.S.R. has for some time sought to tighten its ties with France and to insinuate itself into the affairs of Western Europe. Through the voice of Mr. Litvinov, its delegate to the Disarmament Conference; Mr. Potemkin, its ambassador in Paris; and Mr. Benes himself, who sponsored its candidacy for the League of Nations, it lets it be understood that it would be prepared to associate itself “with any measure capable of consolidating peace.” Thus it hastens to grasp the hand Laval extends to it.

Laval is not fooled by these pacific declarations. “The Soviets want a treaty in order to have war. And I want it in order to avoid it,” he says to one of his intimates. But he nonetheless enters into negotiations, convinced that he will have the last word.

These are longer and more arduous than he had foreseen. Several times the talks are on the point of breaking down, for Mr. Potemkin insists on giving the Treaty an automatic character and on completing it with a military convention that would put France at Russia's mercy, while Laval wants at all costs to introduce restrictive clauses leaving his country a certain freedom of appreciation.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Cited by Georges Bonnet in “Les Négociations franco-russes de 1938 et de 1939,” La Revue de Paris, 54 (1947), no. 11, pp. 93–101.

2. Just as Masaryk in 1918 (see above, p. 61, note 2), Benes makes himself the introducer of the U.S.S.R. into Western affairs. Litvinov will personally thank him for his efforts in his reception speech at the League of Nations. (See vol. III, p. 272.) The reinforcement of friendship between Prague and Moscow is one of the constants of Czechoslovak policy.

3. All the more since the Herriot-Dovgalevsky non-aggression pact expired on 29 November 1934. Because of this, Russia feels isolated.

4. André Guénier, cited by Alfred Mallet, Laval, I, 85.

[[PDF page 215]]

Finally, the Treaty is signed in Paris on 2 May 1935. It is a pact of mutual assistance, valid for five years and completed by a “Protocol of Signature” that links its entry into force to the League of Nations' determination of aggression. Particularly important is paragraph 4 of the Protocol, for it makes it possible to perceive clearly Laval's hidden thoughts:

The two governments, one reads there, note that the negotiations that have just resulted in the signing of the present Treaty were originally opened with a view to completing a security agreement embracing the countries of north-eastern Europe, namely the U.S.S.R., Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the

Baltic States neighboring the U.S.S.R....

Although circumstances have not yet permitted the conclusion of these agreements—which the two Parties continue to consider desirable—it nonetheless remains that the commitments stated in the Franco-Soviet assistance treaty must be understood as not to operate except within the limits of the tripartite agreement previously projected.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Having received in July 1935 Mr. Potemkin, who came to give him the assurance that Moscow wished to see the pact completed by a military convention, Colonel Fabry, then Minister of War, temporized, just like Laval, because neither the one nor the other wanted the brutal automatism of a convention that might bring war. Potemkin having insisted, and Fabry having replied that every risk of war made him mistrustful, Potemkin added, not without a touch of insolence: “Why should war frighten us?” (Fabry, J'ai connu...) According to Fabry, the U.S.S.R. ambassador even added: “Soviet Russia emerged from the last war; Soviet Europe will emerge from the next.” It seems, however, unlikely that Potemkin expressed his hidden thoughts so clearly.

2. “Laval's diplomatic collaborators strove by every means to give the future pact a purely formal character,” Potemkin will write (Histoire de la Diplomatie, III, p. 550). Paul Reynaud, for his part, will not hesitate to accuse Laval “of having emptied the Pact of its content” by introducing into it a cog intended to jam its mechanism: recourse to the League of Nations. (Commission d'enquête, VIII, p. 2366.)

4. It can be seen that Laval had not entirely abandoned the idea of an “Eastern Locarno.”

5. This clause means that the Pact does not operate in the event that the U.S.S.R. is attacked by an Asian Power—in this case, Japan. The various restrictions contained in the Treaty will maintain among the Russians a psychosis of distrust.

[[PDF page 216]]

Ten days after the signing of this Treaty, Laval leaves for Moscow, where he arrives on 13 May. It is the first time that the head of the Soviet Government receives a minister of a bourgeois Republic. The reception is sumptuous: banquets in the Kremlin, visits to the great metallurgical factories, a performance of Swan Lake at the Bolshoi Theater mark three days of conversations with Kalinin, Molotov, and Stalin. During the visit to the air base of Mounino, where the French Foreign Minister is received by Marshal Voroshilov, formations of fighter aircraft draw the letters R.F. in the sky. From each aircraft jumps a woman parachutist carrying a bouquet of flowers, the tricolor whole of which is offered to Mr. Laval. Nothing is neglected to convince the envoy of France of the military power of the U.S.S.R. As for the conversations with Stalin, they take place in a particularly cordial atmosphere. An astonishing photograph shows Laval and Stalin seated side by side. Both have the same smile, but they seem to have exchanged their masks: Stalin resembles an Auvergnat and Laval a Georgian.

But then the death of Marshal Piłsudski is announced. Warsaw goes into mourning and prepares to give the victor of the Red Army a national funeral. Laval decides to go there on his way back. Is this not an opportunity ready-made to see Colonel Beck and seek to know the bottom of his thought? Laval has already met him at Geneva on 16 and 19 January, but had been able to draw from him only evasive remarks. Now that he has the Franco-Russian Pact in his pocket, he thinks it will be easier to make him come out of his reserve.

“Beware of the Czechs!” Piłsudski had recommended at the announcement of the negotiations between Laval and Potemkin. Now that the Marshal is dead, Beck regards this phrase as his political testament. When, after the funeral, Laval tries to force him into his last entrenchments, he runs into a closed and enigmatic personage.

“Mr. Benes asked me to put a question to you,” says Laval. “In the event that Germany attacked Czechoslovakia and this aggression brought about the intervention of France, would Poland attack Czechoslovakia?”

[[PDF page 217]]

“Well, Mr. President,” replies Colonel Beck with insolent nonchalance, “tell Mr. Benes that I refuse to answer that question! Such is the official and irrevocable position of the Polish Government.”

After which, he launches into a violent diatribe against the Czech Government. The least that can be said is that this is scarcely reassuring.

On the same day (16 May 1935), Benes signs with Moscow a pact of mutual assistance modeled on the French treaty. Immediately violent incidents break out at Teschen; the Sudeten Germans give free rein to their discontent, and anti-Soviet opposition strengthens in Romania. But it is neither in Bucharest nor in Warsaw that the reactions against the Franco-Soviet Pact are most violent: it is in Berlin. Hitler does the impossible to prevent its ratification. He recalls his renunciation of Alsace-Lorraine and repeats that no territorial dispute remains between France and Germany since the Saar has returned to the Reich. But his efforts encounter no echo in Paris.

On 27 February 1936, despite the opposition of certain deputies of the center and the right, the French Parliament ratifies the Moscow Pact. Eight days later, Hitler occupies the Rhineland like a thunderbolt. Efforts to build an “Eastern Locarno” have had only one result: to destroy the “Western Locarno.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The Poles' anger is further increased by the attempts of the Prague Government to conclude a new agreement with the leaders of the Sudeten parties favorable to government collaboration. They fear that the German minority may obtain advantages that would favor it to the detriment of the Polish minority.

2. Questioned on 14 November 1937 by Mr. Bullitt, United States ambassador in Paris, Colonel Beck will give him almost the same reply. “I asked Beck,” he writes, “what Poland would do if a war occurred between France and Germany following a German aggression against Czechoslovakia. Beck replied that in the hypothetical case I evoked... Poland would not march... that in no case would Poland let itself be drawn into a conflict to protect France's satellites in Central Europe, and especially not to protect Czechoslovakia.” (Note of Ambassador Bullitt to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Paris, 23 November 1937, Bullitt, William C., 382–383, Department of State, M.S.)

5. Notably Messrs. Pierre Taittinger, Marcel Héraud, Jean Montigny, Philippe Henriot, and Jacques Doriot.

7. A question then arises: do the treaties concluded alongside the Locarno Pact retain their validity despite the abolition of the Pact itself? Despite the opinion of certain jurists, one is obliged to answer: yes. Germany maintains her arbitration agreement with Prague. England makes known “that she will

continue to respect the commitments she contracted at Locarno in the event that France should be the victim of an unprovoked aggression, duly established by the League of Nations." Finally, France declares that her assistance treaty with Czechoslovakia remains in force despite the disappearance of the Locarno Pact. To avoid any ambiguity on this subject, the French General Staff will invoke, in its notes, the assistance treaty of 1924. (See above, p. 202.)

[[PDF page 218]]

Meanwhile, the rapprochement between Moscow and the Little Entente has not progressed by one step. On the contrary. Barely six weeks after Piłsudski's death, Colonel Beck goes to Berlin to confirm the German-Polish non-aggression pact concluded by his predecessor. The conversations concern the Reich's peaceful dispositions toward Poland, the problem of that country's western frontiers, and the struggle against the communist peril. Beck leaves again for Warsaw delighted by his visit. He is more and more decided to oppose Russia and not to draw closer to the Little Entente. From this moment, the essential aim of his policy will consist in accelerating the disintegration of Czechoslovakia.

Alarmed by the continuous rise of German strength, Belgium withdraws from the collective-security system and repudiates the obligations deriving from the pact of the League of Nations. On 14 October 1936, King Leopold III makes known that his country "will henceforth follow an exclusively Belgian policy." A few days later, Luxembourg and the Netherlands proclaim their return to neutrality and officially inform London and Paris of it. Shortly afterward, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden follow their example. Switzerland distances itself from the Geneva organization. The Rome agreements and those of Stresa have melted like snow in the sun. The unfortunate sanctions affair has pushed Italy into Germany's arms.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. On 5 November 1937, Poland and Germany will publish a joint declaration on minorities. On the negotiations and drafting of this text, see Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, V, 1, 2, 6–13, 16, 18. Hitler, however, will refuse to include the slightest reference to the population of Danzig.

2. "He emphasized first," Count Czembek relates in his Journal, "that, personally, his conversations with Hitler made an excellent impression on him. Hitler appeared to him as absolutely sincere." (9 July 1935.)

3. The King bases his decision on the following arguments: 1. Germany's rearmament, following the integral militarization of Italy and Russia; 2. the transformation of methods of war under the influence of technical progress, notably in aviation and motorization; 3. the reoccupation of the Rhineland and the transfer to the Belgian frontiers of the starting bases of a possible German invasion; 4. the internal dissensions of certain neighboring States that risk becoming entangled in rivalries of political and social systems of other States. "All these facts," declares the King, "underline the necessity of remaining outside conflicts that might oppose certain of our neighbors." Following this declaration, the Polish Foreign Ministry informs the Quai d'Orsay "that the Franco-Polish Treaty has practically lost all meaning." (Tansill, Back Door to War, p. 328.)

[[PDF page 219]]

(Significant fact: on the day when the Assembly voted this measure, Benes was presiding over the League of Nations and had actively worked to have Italy condemned. This is an insult that Mussolini will not forget.) Encouraged by Rome, Hungarian and Bulgarian revisionism raise their tone. At the

same time, Hungary draws closer to Germany, and Poland to Hungary. Hitler contemplates this crisscrossing with evident satisfaction: the whole edifice of Genevan Europe is beginning to crack.

Frightened by so many unfavorable symptoms, Chautemps sends General Gamelin to Warsaw to try to serve as mediator between Poland and Czechoslovakia (August 1936). Before his departure, Benes has given him a letter for General Rydz-Śmigły, in which he begs him to reconsider his refusal to conclude an assistance pact with Czechoslovakia. After a rapid reading, Rydz-Śmigły returns the letter to Gamelin and answers him haughtily:

“Barring unforeseen events, Poland envisages no military action against Czechoslovakia. Prague is wasting its time erecting fortifications along our frontier!”

At the beginning of September, Rydz-Śmigły comes to Paris to return General Gamelin's visit. Everyone invites him, flatters him, and heaps attentions upon him in the hope of making him go back on his refusal. But before leaving Warsaw, the commander-in-chief of the Polish Army has told Colonel Beck: “If General Gamelin takes it into his head to try to foist upon us a guarantee for Czechoslovakia, he will hear me tell him that it is unacceptable for us. If we are asked what we shall do in the event of war between Germany and Czechoslovakia, we shall refuse to answer.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Their return to neutrality will be made official by the joint declaration of the Scandinavian States of 28 May 1938. In July 1938, the Copenhagen Conference will completely release them from the Geneva obligations.

[[PDF page 220]]

Properly indoctrinated by his Foreign Minister, Rydz-Śmigły will not deviate from this line throughout his stay in Paris.

It is too little to say that the Geneva edifice is cracking: it is collapsing in whole sections. The resounding failures of the League of Nations vis-à-vis Japan, Italy, and Germany have finished discrediting it. To try to save what remains, Yvon Delbos, Foreign Minister of the Chautemps Cabinet, once more makes the tour of the capitals (December 1937). His journey has received only reluctant approval from Downing Street. The British Government believes that France is wrong to revive her eastern alliances. Would this not rather be the time to free herself from them? London has never had confidence in the solidity of the Little Entente. Still less now that the Soviet Pact has half ruined it.

Delbos's mission consists in renewing bonds of friendship between France and Poland, and in persuading Romania and Yugoslavia to unite with Czechoslovakia in order to oppose more effectively the ambitions of Germany and Hungary. But the French minister has few illusions. However brief it is, the conversation he has with Mr. von Neurath during his passage through Berlin allows the Reich Foreign Minister to measure his skepticism. On his arrival in the Polish capital, the semi-official press welcomes him with a series of articles affirming “that the Polish-Czech dispute can be resolved only by direct negotiations between Prague and Warsaw.” Delbos perhaps does not have very deep political views, but he is a sensitive and shrewd man. He understands that he has no interest in venturing onto this slippery ground.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. The attitude of General Rydz-Śmigły is all the stranger because he has no illusions about Germany's

real feelings toward Poland. But he is a weak temperament who seems literally bewitched by Colonel Beck, whom everyone considers Poland's “strong man.”

3. On 28 January 1937, the editorial committee of The Times considers that “the pacts concluded with the Soviets by France and Czechoslovakia are incompatible with a free settlement of European political problems, and that no Englishman will subscribe to the commitments deriving from new agreements so long as these pacts with the Bolsheviks subsist.” (Paul Sibbertz, Die Tschechische Gefahr, p. 214.)

[[PDF page 221]]

If the press articles had not already convinced him, the toast offered by Colonel Beck during the banquet he gives him at the Foreign Ministry would suffice to dissipate his last hopes:

“Our friendship,” declares Beck, “has this peculiarity, that each of the two partners continues to follow his own path and defend his own interests, while being ready to examine, with the greatest benevolence, all problems concerning their common fate.” To conclude, Beck informs him that Poland has colonial ambitions and asks him “whether he would agree to have all Polish Jews deported to Madagascar.” History has not preserved the French minister's reply.

In Bucharest, France's envoy does not manage to place a word on Romania's adherence to the Franco-Czech Pact, and the National Peasant Party—the most numerous in Parliament—forbids its members to attend the receptions offered in his honor. The Romanian Government manifestly has no desire to commit itself further with a country dominated by the Popular Front and, on top of that, allied with Russia. If Delbos has run into the specters of Vilna and Teschen in Warsaw, in Bucharest he runs into those of Bessarabia and Dobruja.

In Belgrade, Delbos merely wastes his time. All his efforts to bring Yugoslavia closer to Czechoslovakia run into the formal refusal of Mr. Stoyadinović. The Yugoslav President of the Council has just returned from a visit to Rome where he spoke at length with Mussolini. The Duce drew his attention to the enormous risks his country would run if it were to follow up French proposals.

“Believe me,” the head of the Italian Government told him, “collective security has become synonymous with collective insecurity. In your place, I would refuse to row any longer in that galley.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Communiqué of the Polish Iskra Agency, 3 December 1937. Léon Noël, L'Agression allemande contre la Pologne: une ambassade à Varsovie, 1935–1939, p. 174 ff.

4. Taken from Bulgaria in November 1919 by the Treaty of Neuilly.

[[PDF page 222]]

To show Mussolini clearly that he has understood his warning, the head of the Yugoslav Government has the police charge groups of progressive students who had come to acclaim the French minister.

From there, Delbos goes to Prague, where his arrival is awaited with the impatience one can imagine. As his train rolls across the Hungarian plain, he says to the members of his suite: “At last we are going to arrive among real friends!”

In the capital of Bohemia, the population gives him an enthusiastic welcome. On 16 December 1937, at the end of a banquet, Delbos pronounces an emotional toast: “We are bound by so many ties, we feel things in such similar fashion, the forms of our two governments are so closely related,” he declares, “that a Frenchman feels at home in Czechoslovakia and a Czech feels at home in France!” But in the silence of the Hradčany, he is obliged to confess to Benes the full extent of his disappointment. The result of his conversations is entirely negative.

Benes conceals his disappointment beneath a façade of optimism. The two men part empty-handed and heavy-hearted. The Little Entente is broken and Delbos has not even picked up its pieces.

“I have made what may be called an excellent journey,” he declares to journalists when disembarking in Paris. Absorbed by problems of domestic politics, French opinion will take him at his word; but international opinion will no longer understand anything.

Yet informed minds see very well what is happening. After rallying Italy to herself and absorbing Austria, Germany's growing strength has neutralized Poland and drawn Hungary, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia into her orbit. Meanwhile, France has displeased England and lost most of her continental supports.

At the beginning of 1938, the Europe born of the Treaty of Versailles, whose capital was Geneva and which had stretched from the Atlantic to the Black Sea, no longer exists.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. And to boo Mr. Stoyadinović, which will not prevent the Belgrade Government from publishing, on the day after the Anschluss, the following declaration: “Yugoslavia has always been the champion of the principle according to which all ethnic elements of a nation must be united within the same State. She remains faithful to this principle. She maintains friendly relations with the Reich. This friendship will continue to inspire her attitude now that she is its neighbor.” (Official declaration of 14 March 1938.)

2. “Despite the sad lessons of this journey,” writes Jean Montigny, “nothing was changed in our foreign policy.” (Unpublished memoirs.)

[[PDF page 223]]

The revisionist Powers have finally prevailed over those that had set themselves the task of maintaining the status quo. As a result, the continent finds itself cut vertically into three compartments: the Rome-Berlin Axis bars the Western nations' access to Central Europe, and the diplomatic and military barrier erected by Poland and Romania against the Soviets makes a Russian intervention practically impossible.

Even before the crisis enters its acute phase, France and Czechoslovakia are isolated.

[[PDF page 224]]

HITLER DECIDES TO FINISH WITH CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Until now, Hitler has let Czechoslovakia “stew in its own juice.” Instead of intervening in the Sudeten affair, as Hans Krebs and the leaders of the D.N.S.A.P. have been asking him to do since 1933, he has

multiplied soothing declarations toward the Prague Government. When he denounced the Locarno Pact (7 March 1936), he specified that the German-Czech arbitration agreement remained in force. He has repeatedly stressed how correct relations between the two countries remain, and when the troops of von Bock and Guderian entered Austria, he concentrated no forces on the borders of Bohemia. More than this, he charged Göring to tell Mr. Mastny, Benes's representative in Berlin, “that Czechoslovakia had no reason to feel the slightest cause for concern.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Boris Celovsky, Das Münchener Abkommen, p. 61. Berlin confirms the validity of the agreement for three additional years, that is, until 1939. Even after the Anschluss, Hitler will not denounce it.

2. From 1936 onward, he proposed to Benes that he sign with Czechoslovakia a commercial agreement and even a non-aggression pact, but the matter had no sequel. On the negotiations of Mr. Trauttmannsdorff in Prague, see vol. IV, p. 261 ff.; also Celovsky, op. cit., pp. 88–90.

4. Göring will renew these assurances four times: on 11 March 1937 at 11 p.m.; on 12 March, shortly after 1 a.m.; on 13 March, between 3 and 4 p.m.; finally the same day, around 8 p.m. This shows all the importance Hitler attached to not having a conflict with Czechoslovakia on his hands at the moment when his troops were proceeding to occupy Austria. To avoid any incident, Wehrmacht units had received the order to keep 15 to 30 kilometers away from the Czechoslovak frontier. (Fritz Berber, Die Europäische Politik 1933–1938 im Spiegel der Prager Akten.)

[[PDF page 225]]

As a result, the Czechs have not mobilized, still preferring the Anschluss to a restoration of the Habsburgs.

Why has the head of the Third Reich adopted this attitude, so little in accord with his real feelings? Because the affair was not ripe and it would have been imprudent to unmask his batteries too soon. During the whole period from the conquest of power to 1938, Hitler takes the greatest care to proceed by stages, to circumscribe his objectives and isolate them before falling upon them. He restored compulsory military service before occupying the Rhineland, and occupied the Rhineland before rushing upon Vienna, in order to protect his right flank against the risk of French reprisals. It is only when all these conditions have been brought together, and he has been sure that Mussolini will not react, that he overthrows Schuschnigg and proclaims the Anschluss.

Likewise, it is only after the Anschluss that he begins to concentrate his attention on Czechoslovakia. Now that the incorporation of Austria into the Reich has given him a common frontier with Hungary and Yugoslavia—thanks to which he can exercise increased pressure on the other Danubian States—and he knows he can count on Poland's benevolent neutrality, he considers the moment has come to deal it the coup de grâce.

All the more since the enthusiasm with which he was welcomed in Vienna has sent a shiver of hope through all the Germanic populations situated beyond the eastern frontiers of the Reich. At Iglau and Reichenberg, at Danzig and Memel, everyone has thought that the day is near when he too will be “reintegrated” into his fatherland. On 14 March 1938, at the hour when Hitler was driving on the road from Linz to

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2. Hitler hated the Czechs. He put them in the same bag as the Habsburgs, the Vatican, the Social Democrats, and the Jews. (See Mein Kampf, pp. 558–562.) “To speak calmly of the Czechs or of Benes was practically impossible for him,” says his interpreter Paul Schmidt. (Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne, p. 437.)

3. Certain historians have claimed that the head of the Third Reich had no preconceived plan and waited for events to dictate his conduct. This thesis seems difficult to accept. Certainly, he took the greatest account of events, and events served him in a stupefying manner, at least during the first part of his life. But he could derive such great advantages from them only thanks to the minuteness of his preparations, an uncommon instinct for political situations, and the fact that his acts were linked together according to a rigorous plan.

HISTORY OF THE GERMAN ARMY, V: THE TRIALS OF STRENGTH (1938)
Benoist-Méchin

English translation — Section 5 of 10
PDF pages 226–278
Translation note: rapid, accuracy-focused translation from the corrected embedded text layer. No new OCR was performed. Page markers from the source text are preserved.

[[PDF page 226]]

Vienna, Conrad Henlein cried out before an enthusiastic audience:

“The struggle we are waging is that of Right, Truth, and Justice, because we know that loyalty toward the German people is deeply rooted in the soul and heart of the Sudetens. That is why we are certain that our struggle will be crowned with success.”

But this time Hitler will not be content merely to annex the German populations of Bohemia. The conflict opposing the Sudetens to the Prague Government will serve as cover for a much vaster plan, whose real objective is the destruction of Czechoslovakia. In his projects of spatial conquest, which Hitler reveals only gradually to his collaborators, the next stage consists in dismantling this fortified bastion that advances into his left flank and threatens his vital centers, in blowing open this lock that bars his access to Romanian oil, Ukrainian wheat and — still more — the immense plains of the East, which he already sees populated by one hundred million Germans.

This is not the first time he has evoked this project. He has already sketched its broad outlines during the secret military conference held on 5 November 1937 at the Berlin Chancellery. On 21 April 1938, that is, one month after the Anschluss, he summons General Keitel to charge him with working out its methods of execution.

“The idea of a sudden aggression against Czechoslovakia, without justification or precise motive, must be rejected,” he tells him.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Pierre Cot, French Air Minister, who was the first to call Czechoslovakia the “aircraft carrier of the democracies,” makes no secret “that combined attacks by the French and Czech air forces could rapidly

destroy all German production centers." [Interview given to the News Chronicle, 14 July 1938.] Hitler is not unaware of this: "The capital of the Reich," he writes, "is situated scarcely 190 kilometers from the Czech frontier. At the same distance, as the crow flies, are Weimar and the Gulf of Stettin. This means that, starting from these frontiers, Berlin can be reached in less than an hour by modern aircraft. Munich is at the same distance from the Czech frontier as Berlin. Czech military aircraft would need about sixty minutes to reach Munich, forty minutes for Nuremberg, thirty minutes for Regensburg; even Augsburg is only 200 kilometers from the Czech frontier and could therefore be reached in less than an hour by present-day aircraft." {L'Expansion du Reich, pp. 147–148.}

[[PDF page 227]]

"Such a way of acting would provoke a hostile reaction in world opinion and would risk bringing us serious complications. An action following a period of diplomatic tension, culminating in crisis and war, is not desirable either, because it would deprive us of the effect of surprise and would leave the adversary time to set up his security system. The best solution would consist in a lightning attack, based on an unforeseen incident (for example the assassination of the German minister in Prague during an anti-German demonstration), which would place the Reich before an intolerable provocation and would provide — in the eyes of at least a part of world opinion — the justification for our military preparations.

"From these premises," Hitler continues, "there follow a certain number of conclusions:

1. The inevitable loss of time caused by the rail transport of the bulk of the divisions must be reduced to a minimum, so as not to compromise the launching of a lightning attack at the desired moment;

2. Partial thrusts intended to break the line of defense at numerous points and in tactically advantageous directions must be carried out simultaneously. These thrusts must be studied minutely (knowledge of roads, reconnaissance of objectives, composition of columns according to the missions to be fulfilled);

3. The attack must be carried out simultaneously by land and by air. The role of the Luftwaffe will consist in supporting the advance of the individual columns (by dive-bombing, neutralization of the fortifications at the penetration points, halting the movement of reserves, destruction of signaling systems, and the isolation of enemy garrisons that will result from this);

4. The first four days of military action will be decisive from the political point of view. In the absence of striking military successes,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Did Hitler think of himself provoking an attempt on the person of Mr. Eisenlohr, German minister in Prague? Nothing permits one to affirm it, and the Nuremberg documents provide no confirmation. It nevertheless seems certain that Hitler thought of Sarajevo — he himself will say so to Keitel during a conversation he will have with him on 10 September 1938 at the Nuremberg Congress (Documents of the Allied Military Tribunal, X, 570) — and that he remembered the assassination attempt prepared in Vienna by Mr. Leopold against Mr. von Papen, with the intention of precipitating an action by the Wehrmacht against Austria. (See vol. IV, p. 473.)

2. As may be seen, Hitler does not at any moment think of settling the Sudeten problem by negotiation.

[[PDF page 228]]

an European crisis will become inevitable. The initial successes must therefore be such as to convince the foreign military Powers that armed intervention is hopeless;

5. Our allies will have to be brought into action at the appropriate time, in order to demoralize the adversary;

6. The time that will elapse between the first breakthrough of the enemy lines and the entry into action of the bulk of the troops must be used by the determined and irresistible advance of a motorized army (for example through Pilsen toward Prague);

7. The transport movements provided for by Plan Green and Plan Red must be separated. Nevertheless, we must be ready at every moment to execute the operations provided for in Plan Red.

“I reserve to myself the fixing of the date on which operations are to begin,” Hitler concludes.

Returning to the Bendlerstrasse, Keitel hastens to put this plan under study. But it very quickly becomes apparent to the General Staff that this arrangement would gain by being modified on certain points.

First — if certain information emanating from the Prague General Staff is to be believed — it is not certain that the Czechs will cling to their fortifications. These have been erected along the borders, that is, in zones populated by hostile minorities. From the outbreak of hostilities, these populations will rise up and create such disorders in their rear that their defense will become extremely difficult. Rather than let themselves be captured in a war of position, it is to be presumed that the Czech armies will withdraw toward the east, into the mountains of Slovakia. There they will be able to prolong their resistance — especially if Russian aviation supports them and drops them arms by parachute — until foreign intervention can come to deliver them. In that case one would find oneself facing a long and costly war, which would generate the European crisis that is precisely to be avoided.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
3. Minutes of the Hitler-Keitel conversation of 21 April 1938 (summary), drawn up by Major Schmundt, the Führer's aide-de-camp, Secret Archives of the Wilhelmstrasse, II, document 64, pp. 133–135.

[[PDF page 229]]

Moreover, Plan Green, drawn up before the Anschluss, does not take sufficient account of the new strategic possibilities offered to the Wehrmacht by the attachment of Austria. Why not replace the frontal attack, embodied by the advance of a motorized army moving along the Pilsen-Prague axis, with a pincer offensive carried out by two armies starting, one from Silesia, the other from Lower Austria, which would make their junction somewhere between Brünn and Olmütz? This method, proposed by General von Manstein, would make it possible: 1. to separate Czechia from Slovakia, which would prevent the Czechoslovak forces from falling back eastward; 2. to encircle the whole Czechoslovak Army on the Bohemian plateau, which would compel it to capitulate after a few days. One would thus be faced with a short war, placing foreign capitals before the fait accompli.

On 20 May, Keitel hands Hitler a letter in which he draws his attention to these points:

New directives must be given, effective 1 October 1938 (beginning of the mobilization year for the army), for which you had reserved to yourself, my Führer, the formulation of the political principles and hypotheses.

It is nevertheless necessary, during the interim period, to replace the strategic directives of Plan Green with a new version that takes account both of the situation created by the incorporation of Austria into the Reich and of the presumed most recent plans of the Czech General Staff.

Signed: Keitel.

"There is no urgency," Hitler replies. "I have no intention of launching military action against Czechoslovakia in the near future. Only a direct provocation on its part, a fatal evolution of political circumstances inside Czechoslovakia, or some unforeseen event

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. "After the incorporation of Austria, Hitler declares that he is not in a hurry to settle the Czech question," Jodl writes in his Journal. "First Austria must be digested. Nevertheless the preparations for Plan Green must be pursued energetically, taking account of the transformations brought to the strategic situation by the incorporation of Austria." {Nuremberg Documents, XXVIII, PS-1780.}

[[PDF page 230]]

occurring in Europe, from which a particularly favorable opportunity would arise, which might perhaps never recur, could lead me to change my mind.

"In any case, the first four days of operations will have decisive importance. It is essential within that time to create a strategic situation that demonstrates to the enemy States disposed to intervene that the Czech military position is hopeless, and that would also induce those States which have territorial claims to formulate against Czechoslovakia to join us immediately. In these cases, one may expect intervention by Hungary and Poland, especially if France, because of Italy's unequivocal attitude, is seized with fear, or at least hesitation, before the risk of unleashing a European war by intervening against us. On the other hand, one must in all probability expect Russia to try to aid Czechoslovakia militarily. Everything therefore commands us to act quickly and to force the decision as rapidly as possible."

Hitler then resumes most of the arguments he has already set forth during his conversation of 21 April, but he adds three important points concerning the roles of the minorities, aviation, and the national economy:

1. The minorities must be instructed in advance concerning the missions incumbent upon them and the way in which they must support our military operations. They can also influence neutrals in our favor.

2. The bulk of the Luftwaffe's forces must be used for a surprise attack against Czechoslovakia. The frontier must be crossed by the air force at the same time as by the units of the land army. The Luftwaffe's principal task will be to destroy the Czech air forces and their supply bases in the shortest possible time, in order to prevent these forces — and, if necessary, Russian or French relief forces — from attacking the German Army during the period of deployment and invasion.

The paralysis of mobilization, of the conduct of civil affairs, and of the direction of the armed forces, as

well as the delaying of the deployment of the Czech Army by attacks on its communications system, on mobilization centers, and on Government services, will also contribute decisively to the initial successes of the Army.

3. It is important to increase our war potential by gathering information on all Czech factories

[[PDF page 231]]

working for national defense. These must be spared — insofar as military operations permit — and restarted as rapidly as possible.

Reprisals against the population will be used only with my consent.

“The intervention of the Wehrmacht may be preceded by a vast campaign of agitation and propaganda,” Hitler concludes. “Everything must be ready in advance. But I reserve to myself the fixing of the day and hour on which hostilities will begin.”

What happened then? Perhaps it will never be known. In any case, on 21 May, Prague announces that Germany has mobilized, that war is imminent, and that the Czech Government has recalled a certain number of reservists. This sensational information is taken up by the press of the whole world. The speed with which it spreads testifies to the general nervousness. The French Embassy in Berlin receives from its consulates in Leipzig and Dresden reports that seem to give substance to this news. In Berlin, increased traffic of vehicles transporting Party shock troops is observed.

Wanting to get to the bottom of it, Colonel Stehlin, French air attaché, goes to Tempelhof airport and takes off in his airplane to fly over the roads toward Czechoslovakia. For his part, General de Geffrier, French military attaché, makes a tour of the principal garrisons south of Berlin, from which units called upon to take part in the operations might depart. At the end of the afternoon, a conference brings together the military and air attachés of various countries friendly to France. By comparing their observations, they arrive at the conclusion “that the situation is normal, that there are no military movements on the roads or billeting in the villages, and that in the towns the number of soldiers encountered in walking-out dress corresponds to what may be seen in ordinary times.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. On the evening of 20 May, the Czechoslovak Council of Ministers decided to recall one class of ordinary reservists (80,000 men) and five classes of reservists belonging to the “special arms” (air force and security troops: 47,000; patriotic militias: 24,000; tanks and other special arms: 25,000), or approximately 180,000 men in all.

[[PDF page 232]]

But panic persists. In spite of these reassuring findings, the British Embassy prepares the repatriation of women, children and, generally, all British citizens residing in Germany. In the evening, a relaxation having occurred, the measures planned for evacuating British nationals are not applied.

Nevertheless the nervousness is such that, on 23 May, a new wave of reports revives anxieties. Stehlin and Geffrier undertake a new inspection tour. Once again, they observe that the roads, railways, and airfields present their usual appearance. From the observations gathered during these three days of alert, Colonel Stehlin concludes: “The anxieties of our Czechoslovak friends, based on a press

campaign, have been translated into the description of a military situation that existed only in their imagination."

Since absolutely nothing happens during the following days, the anti-fascist press of Prague, Paris, London, and New York publishes a series of commentaries asserting "that Hitler has backed down," that "the disclosure of his mobilization measures has made him retreat," that in any case he is not capable of carrying out his threats, and that his declarations concerning the settlement of the Sudeten problem "are nothing but wind."

At once the Reich press foams with rage. It declares that the Czech Government is of egregious bad faith, makes much of its persecutions against the German populations, and accuses its leaders of being "warmongers."

What was Benes seeking by allowing this campaign of excitement to develop? To alert the Western Democracies? To lead France and England out of expectancy and into an atmosphere of pre-mobilization? If so, he has made a false maneuver that will turn against him.

When Hitler learns that he is being accused of being afraid and of being incapable of carrying out his threats, his blood boils. Since his will is being doubted,

[[PDF page 233]]

he will take up the challenge. Until now he was still hesitating. Now he hesitates no longer. On the evening of 28 May, he brings together a few influential members of the Party and announces to them "that he will no longer tolerate Czech provocations." On the 30th he summons Keitel to the Chancellery and dictates the following directives to him:

I have taken the irrevocable decision to crush Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future.

It belongs to the Political Direction to fix the favorable moment, from the political and military point of view.

A fatal evolution of circumstances inside Czechoslovakia, or else other political events in Europe suddenly offering a favorable opportunity that might not present itself again, would be of a nature to accelerate my intervention.

The judicious choice and resolute exploitation of a favorable moment are the best guarantees of success.

To this end, preparations must begin immediately.

The first task of the Army consists in putting into action, simultaneously with the Luftwaffe attack, the greatest possible number of assault columns.

These columns, organized according to the tasks assigned to them, must be composed of troops that can be set in motion rapidly because of their stationing near the frontier, their motorization, and their special aptitude for entering instantly into action.

These thrusts will have the objective of penetrating the Czech fortified lines at numerous points and in

a strategically favorable direction, in order to pass through them or take them in reverse. Cooperation with the German population of the Sudeten frontier region, with deserters from the Czechoslovak Army, with parachutists and airborne troops, and with units of the sabotage service will constitute an important factor of success.

The bulk of the Army has the duty of frustrating the Czech defense plan consisting in a withdrawal into Slovakia, of compelling the Czech Army to battle, of defeating it, and of rapidly occupying Bohemia and Moravia. For this purpose, a thrust into the heart of Czechoslovakia must be made with all possible armored and motorized units,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. All the more since London and Paris reacted only very weakly to the announcement of Czech mobilization. The wholly platonic “warnings” lavished by Sir Nevile Henderson enabled Hitler “to judge that neither France nor Great Britain — in spite of the gesture of the British Ambassador in Berlin — seemed determined to risk a war.” (Stehlin, op. cit., p. 81.)

2. The hypothesis of an attack against the Reich minister in Prague no longer figures among the reasons that could trigger armed intervention.

[[PDF page 234]]

exploiting the first successes of the assault columns and the effects of the Luftwaffe's action.

The covering of the rear, on the western side, must be limited in quantity and quality so as to correspond to the present state of our fortifications. I shall decide by special order whether the formations assigned to this covering are to be transported immediately to the western frontier or held in reserve for a later date.

Measures must nevertheless be taken so that security detachments can be transported to the western frontier even during execution of Plan Green. Independently of these preparations, a first security shield must be improvised by using engineers and the formations of the Labor Service now employed in the construction of the fortifications.

It is sufficient that the other frontiers, as well as East Prussia, be weakly garrisoned. Given the political situation, the possible transport of all or part of the active forces of East Prussia toward the Reich must be provided for.

Nothing is changed in the directives to the Luftwaffe. But the navy is assigned broader tasks, and increased importance is given to the uprising of the minorities:

As regards the conduct of the navy, to begin with, only those measures are to be taken that appear necessary to ensure security in the North Sea and the Baltic against the surprise of an intervention by other States in the conflict. These measures must be strictly limited to the indispensable minimum. The most absolute secrecy must be maintained concerning them.

All preparations for sabotage and insurrection will be made by the O.K.W. They will be carried out according to the needs of the Wehrmacht services and in agreement with them, so that their effects are harmonized, in time and place, with the operations conducted by the Army and the Luftwaffe.

Keitel transmits these directives to the General Staff, with the following covering letter:

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Thus the military arrangement is clear. It reflects Hitler's political conceptions: in the east, the bulk of the German forces; in the west, security detachments. In the east, the spearhead; in the west, the shield.

2. This means: “nothing to fear from Poland.”

[[PDF page 235]]

Berlin, 30 May 1938. OKW 42/38

By order of the supreme chief of the Wehrmacht, part II, section 2 of the Directives of 24 June 1937 (G.H.Q. no. 55-37) is to be replaced by the attached version.

Its execution must be assured by 1 October 1938 at the latest.

Modifications to the other parts of the Directives are to be expected during the coming weeks.

Signed: Keitel.

For copy: Zeitzler.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Reference to the first Order to study the methods of Plan Red and Plan Green, given by Hitler on 24 June 1937. (See vol. IV, p. 514.)

[[PDF page 236]]

XI

THE DISLOCATION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA INTENSIFIES

Because Hitler has declared “that a fatal evolution of circumstances inside Czechoslovakia” could lead him to advance the date of hostilities, the events taking place in Prague assume increased importance.

On 13 March, the day of the proclamation of the Anschluss, Henlein addressed to Hitler a telegram of congratulations that ended with these words:

“We fight because there is only one outcome for us: victory.”

Since then, relations between Czechs and Sudetens have never ceased to grow more poisonous. The attachment of Austria to the Reich has unleashed among the Germans of Bohemia “a tumult of hope.” With complete ignorance of the political situation, they imagine that their liberation is now only a matter of days. One of Henlein's deputies, K. H. Frank, keeps them in this illusion. He believes that one must strike while the iron is hot and is astonished at the indecision shown by the leader of the S.d.P. Why does he not take advantage of circumstances to move to insurrection? He almost accuses him of lacking character. But a Sudeten uprising breaking out at that moment

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. “Wir kämpfen, weil wir siegen müssen.”

3. Their impatience is further sharpened by the contrast between their destitution and the prosperity reigning inside the Reich.

4. The same man who was arrested at Teplitz during the elections of November 1937. (See above, p. 189.)

[[PDF page 237]]

would overturn all Hitler's calculations. It is not without reason that the leader of the Third Reich has fixed 1 October as the date of his intervention. The Wehrmacht is not ready and the political conjuncture is not favorable. He still needs four months to ripen the crisis, four months during which it is important to tack, gain time, and not give way to thoughtless impulses.

Thus Hitler charges Eisenlohr, the Reich minister in Prague, with bringing Henlein's too-impetuous deputy back to reason.

“This is less than ever the moment to do stupid things!” Eisenlohr says to Frank in a commanding tone. “At present Berlin considers that a relaxation is necessary. If you want to be able to count on the Führer's support, you must at least begin by obeying his orders!”

These words affect Frank like an icy shower. Disconcerted, he rushes to Berlin to complain there of “Eisenlohr's inexplicable attitude” and to make the Reich leaders understand that there is not a minute to lose. He is rebuffed there and returns to Prague forty-eight hours later, rather demoralized.

“The lesson inflicted on Frank has been salutary,” Eisenlohr declares to the Wilhelmstrasse. “By bringing him back to a more realistic view of things, it will allow me to exercise a moderating influence on the Movement.”

Thereupon the Reich minister in Prague summons Frank and Henlein separately and dictates his conditions to them:

1. The policy and tactical action of the S.d.P. leaders will conform rigorously to German foreign policy, whose line will be communicated to them by the Reich Legation;

2. Public speeches and press interviews will be drafted in common agreement with me;

3. The Party leadership will renounce the intransigent line it has followed up to now, for it can lead only to complications. The Party, in agreement with me, will establish a graduated list of demands that must be supported by parallel diplomatic action. The “Laws for the safeguarding of the people” and the struggle for “territorial autonomy” must pass into the background;

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Eisenlohr's role is not without analogy to that played — with more brilliance — by Mr. von Papen in Vienna.

2. The Wilhelmstrasse and the General Staff closed their doors to him. He was able to speak only with a few subordinate officials.

[[PDF page 238]]

4. In the event that Henlein wishes to know the opinion of the competent Reich authorities before taking decisions or formulating important declarations, these contacts will be prepared and established through the Legation;

5. All information coming from the Sudetens and destined for the German services of the Reich must pass through the Legation;

6. Henlein will have weekly contacts with me and may come consult me in Prague as often as he expresses the desire.

“Now,” Eisenlohr informs Berlin, “I consider that I have the Party firmly in hand.”

Frank rebels against these directives, which represent a disavowal of his personal initiatives. But Henlein, more political than he, understands that Hitler must be left the task of orchestrating events, and that premature action would be in no one's interest. He therefore limits his activity to verbal demonstrations. On 23 March he launches this apostrophe at Benes:

“Take care! Your whole policy is founded on illusions that will soon collapse!”

The S.d.P., moreover, wins an important success during these feverish days. At its founding it had incorporated the troops of the National Party (D.N.P.) and the National-Socialist Workers' Party (D.N.S.A.P.), which the Prague authorities had just dissolved. In the week following the Anschluss, it also absorbs the Agrarian Party and the Christian-Social Party, which until then had collaborated with the Government. This defection strikes a serious blow at Benes's authority. Not only does only one German minister remain within the Cabinet, but the S.d.P. has become the largest group in Parliament. As for Henlein, he has reached one of his principal

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Messrs. Spina and Mayr-Harting having withdrawn, only Mr. Czech, the leader of the German Social-Democratic Party, remains there.

3. At the end of March 1938, out of 71 seats occupied in the Chamber by German elected representatives, the S.d.P. holds 55; in the Senate it holds 26 out of 37. The largest Czech party (the Agrarian Party of Mr. Hodja) holds only 45. At the same time, the Social Democrats have only 11 seats in the Chamber and 6 in the Senate; the German Communists — who operate inside the Czech Communist Party — have 5 seats in the Chamber and 5 in the Senate. (Cf. Kurt Witt, Wirtschaftskräfte und Wirtschaftspolitik in der Tschechoslovakei, p. 182.)

[[PDF page 239]]

objectives: to be the sole spokesman of the German minority.

But if his authority is thereby strengthened, he is nevertheless very embarrassed toward his troops. What should he tell them? The instructions of moderation given by Eisenlohr seem incomprehensible

to them, all the more because neither Henlein nor Frank can give them the reason. They begin to question the attitude of their leaders. Why are they holding them back, when everything seems ready for the final assault? Henlein will have trouble restraining them for another four months. If only he at least knew Berlin's intentions! But on this point Eisenlohr remains impenetrable...

On 19 November 1937, Henlein concluded his secret Report to Hitler by stressing “the urgency of a discussion between the Reich leaders and the leaders of the German minority on the principles that should inspire the S.d.P.'s future policy.” But so far his appeal has remained unanswered. On 17 March he returns to the charge and asks Ribbentrop to arrange an interview for him with Hitler, “for the new situation [created by the Anschluss] requires a joint examination of Sudeten policy.” He assures him in his message “that his gratitude toward the Führer will be translated into redoubled efforts in favor of the Greater-German Reich policy.” Eight days later, Eisenlohr finally brings him the long-awaited answer: Hitler invites him to come confer with him at the
Berlin Chancellery. But this interview must remain rigorously secret.

The meeting takes place on 28 March 1938. It is the first time Hitler and Henlein have seen each other again since the Olympic Games. This time, the words they exchange no longer concern the development of athletics, but a far more burning subject:

“I intend to resolve the Czechoslovak problem in the more or less short term,” Hitler tells him. “That is why it is indispensable that we march hand in

[[PDF page 240]]

hand. The S.d.P. must continue its work of disintegration by presenting the Czech Government with unacceptable conditions. You will be responsible, until further order, for the course of events. But our efforts must be synchronized.”

“In short,” Henlein remarks, “we must always ask Prague for more than it can grant us?”

“Exactly,” Hitler answers, pleasantly surprised by the quickness of his interlocutor's mind. “Besides, you have nothing to fear. I am at your side. Tomorrow you will be my Statthalter.”

The following day, a conference takes place at the Wilhelmstrasse, less to give Henlein new directives than to inform the German services of the agreement reached between Hitler and him. Ribbentrop repeats the Führer's instructions word for word. A work plan is drawn up concerning the staggering of Sudeten demands. These are divided into three categories: 1. immediate demands; 2. those that must be obtained before the opening of negotiations; 3. those that must be obtained in the course of negotiations. The sequel of events is not revealed to Henlein. He is nevertheless very satisfied with the result: not only has Hitler confirmed him in his position as “Führer” of the Sudetens, but he has arguments that will allow him to reassure his subordinates. As for Ribbentrop, he emerges delighted from this meeting. “There is no doubt,” he writes, “that the Sudeten efforts, thus directed by us, will end by creating a grave situation.”

Back in Czechoslovakia, Henlein invites the Sudeten Party to meet in General Assembly. The Congress, held at Karlsbad on 23 and 24 April, is the most imposing

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Taking part, besides Ribbentrop and Henlein, are three members of the S.d.P. Steering Committee:

Messrs. Frank, Kuenzel, and Kreisel; Messrs. von Mackensen, von Weizsäcker, Eisenlohr, Twardowski, Altenburg, and Erich Kordt, from the Foreign Ministry, as well as Obergruppenführer Lorenz and Dr. Haushofer, from the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle. (This service serves as liaison organ between the Reich authorities and Germans abroad.)

[[PDF page 241]]

mass demonstration that the S.d.P. has yet known. Tens of thousands of militants, coming from all the German districts, rush to their leader's call. At the end of his closing speech, Henlein reads, amid a storm of acclamations, a program in eight points which he declares “represents the minimum with which the German population can be content.” He demands:

1. The establishment of total equality of rank and rights between the German group and the Czech people;

2. The elevation of the Sudeten German group to the rank of a juridical personality, empowered to defend its rights itself;

3. The delimitation and recognition of a zone of Germanic settlement;

4. The creation of a German administration inside this territory;

5. The adoption of legislation intended to ensure the protection of Germanic nationals established outside this territory;

6. Reparation for the damages caused to the Sudetens since 1918 and, in general, for all injustices committed against them;

7. Recognition and application of the principle according to which there will be only German officials inside German territory;

8. Full freedom for the Sudetens to proclaim their belonging to Germanism and to claim adherence to German ideology.

This last paragraph alone is enough to make these conditions unacceptable to the Prague Government. One need not be a prophet to foresee that an autonomous Sudeten province governed according to National-Socialist principles will not remain long within the framework of a democratic State. Unanimously, the entire Czech press lets loose against the “Karlsbad Program.” “Berlin has spoken through Henlein's mouth,” writes the unofficial newspaper Lidové Noviny. “These demands were drafted in Berlin and

1. That is, Nazi. Walter Schneefuss, Deutsch-Böhmen, Appendix VII, p. 185.

[[PDF page 242]]

are officially German, in the proper sense of the term. Henlein held a conclave in Berlin with the head of the Nazi Party. It is Hitler who dictates his words to him. His demands represent neither the

maximum program nor the minimum program of the German minority. They are purely and simply the Third Reich's program in foreign policy."

But the mere statement of the Karlsbad program has unexpected consequences. It opens a double crisis: inside the Cabinet and inside Parliament. Mr. Czech, the last German minister, gave his resignation on 8 April. When Mr. Hodja asks him to resume his place in the ministry, he refuses, alleging that, although a Social Democrat and opponent of Nazism, he does not wish to oppose the demand for autonomy formulated by his compatriots. He has to be replaced by Mr. Ježek, the leader of the Czech Constitutional Party. Henceforth all Germans are in opposition, and Prague has no interlocutor other than the S.d.P. for everything concerning the Germanic minority. In Parliament, where the atmosphere becomes more and more stormy, representatives of the Polish and Hungarian minorities, as well as the leaders of the Slovak People's Party, read declarations in which aspirations to autonomy are openly expressed.

What can Mr. Hodja do? The more tense the situation becomes, the more his margin for maneuver diminishes. After the split of the Germans, now the split of the Hungarians and Slovaks is announced. It is clear, henceforth, that the solution to the Sudeten problem is no longer in Karlsbad or Reichenberg, but in London and Berlin. During the interview that Jan Masaryk

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. To tell the truth, his situation has become extremely uncomfortable, for he is daily vilified by Sudeten circles. The new President of the Social-Democratic Party, Wenzel Jaksch, tries to come to his aid by declaring that the "S.d.P., become a simple extension of the Nazi Party, distorts the legitimate demands of the Sudetens." He proposes political and cultural autonomy, in which the economy will serve as the link between Prague and the German minority. But this project hardly pleases the Social-Democratic Party, which prefers to withdraw its support from the Government. (See Frankfurter Zeitung, 12 May 1938, and Revue de Droit international XXI, 1938, p. 488 ff. and XXII, 1938, p. 621 ff.)

5. The son of former President Masaryk, who holds the post of Czechoslovak Ambassador in London.

[[PDF page 243]]

had on 25 March with Sir Samuel Hoare, the latter strongly recommended to him "not to neglect the advantages that might result from negotiation." Under the pressure of events, the Czechoslovak Government has entered upon this path. Not in the hope of arriving at a result, but to demonstrate to London that the demands of the Sudetens make any negotiation impossible and to lead the British Cabinet to modify its point of view. On 26 April, Mr. Hodja sends Downing Street a draft "Federal Statute" for the Czechoslovak State, in which he provides broad concessions to the minorities but refuses the principle of territorial autonomy.

"It is too little and too late!" Konrad Henlein ironizes on reading this project. "It was twenty years ago, at the time of Chancellor Renner, that these things should have been proposed!"

Will Great Britain and France finally understand that any negotiation with the Sudetens is doomed to failure? Will they intervene in Berlin to ask the Reich leaders to moderate the demands of Henlein and his friends? England and France do indeed intervene. But not in Berlin: in Prague. On 7 May, their ambassadors make a joint démarche to the Czech Government to press it "to seek a rapid and peaceful solution to the Sudeten problem."

A rapid and peaceful solution? Mr. Hodja would ask for nothing better. But when he submits his draft Statute to the leaders of the Sudeten Party, they abruptly break off the talks, under the pretext “that no negotiation can succeed in the atmosphere of provocation maintained by the Czechoslovak Government.” That very evening Henlein leaves “on vacation” abroad.

Everyone is convinced that he is going to Berlin to seek new instructions from Hitler. He does indeed pass through

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. By a note dated 10 July 1919, Chancellor Renner had proposed immediately endowing the Czechoslovak State with a federal Constitution. This request was rejected by the Allies. (See above, p. 152.)

2. To intervene in Berlin would be to admit that the solution of the problem lies in Hitler's hands.

3. Revue de Droit international, XXI, 1938, p. 489; Documents on British Foreign Policy, I, 231, 250.

[[PDF page 244]]

the Chancellery, where he has a long conversation with the Führer. But the aim of his trip is not Berlin: it is London. When Hitler learns this, he strongly encourages him to go there.

“Do everything you can to dissuade England from intervening in the conflict,” he tells him.

At the end of this conversation, Henlein goes to see Mr. von Weizsäcker to explain how he intends to acquit himself of his mission. “Mr. Henlein will deny that his trip is inspired by Berlin,” the State Secretary at the Wilhelmstrasse notes. “He will assert that we knew the Karlsbad program only after its publication. He will insist above all on the rapid decomposition of Czechoslovakia.”

Henlein arrives on 12 May on the banks of the Thames. At Benes's request, he is not received there by any member of the government. But he sees a certain number of journalists and politicians, among them Churchill, Archibald Sinclair, and Sir Robert Vansittart, who immediately reports his remarks to his minister. The Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office sees in him “a wise and moderate spirit, an apostle of conciliation.” Lord Halifax holds him “to be a man of good faith sincerely desirous of finding a rapid settlement to the Sudeten problem.” Henlein carries Machiavellianism so far as to pay a visit to Jan Masaryk, to set forth his points of view to him. He shows great moderation, affirms to him that Berlin has nothing to do with his visit to London, and convinces him so thoroughly of the purity of his intentions that the Czechoslovak Ambassador sends a dispatch to his government, begging it to resume the interrupted negotiation as soon as possible. Henlein

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Jodl's Journal, 22 May 1938: “Detailed conversation of the Führer with K. Henlein. See appendix.” (The appendix has disappeared.)

4. “He told me that he had always been an apostle of conciliation,” writes Sir Robert Vansittart, “and I hastened to assure him that I knew how true that was.” {Documents on British Foreign Policy, I, Appendix II.}

5. Halifax even worries about him: “If certain circles knew that Herr Henlein is disposed to be as reasonable as his conversations make him appear, he might have trouble with his supporters, and the National-Socialist leaders [in Berlin] might be tempted to stiffen him, which would run counter to the effect we are seeking.” {Documents on British Foreign Policy, I, 219–220.}

6. “I have the impression,” he writes, “that Henlein would prefer to be the Governor of a semi-autonomous Sudetenland than a new Seyss-Inquart.” And he adds candidly: “The mere fact that Henlein has come here without asking Berlin's prior permission seems to me a good omen.”

[[PDF page 245]]

takes advantage of his stay in England to found “Press Bureaus” in London and Paris. In short, his trip is, in every respect, a success. He has persuaded the English that Czechoslovakia is on the eve of dislocation, but that it is still possible to find a peaceful solution to the problems tearing it apart.

Henlein returns to Prague just in time to participate in the municipal elections, whose date has been fixed for the Sundays of 22, 29 May, and 12 June. The Czech Government has already postponed them several times, for fear of the incidents they might provoke. But it has not been able to put them off any longer, under pain of showing that it does not respect the democratic principles it invokes at every moment. No doubt it hopes that they will mark a retreat by the S.d.P. The slightest weakening of its vote would allow it to say that Henlein's star is declining and that the danger he represents is fading on the horizon...

To provoke defections among his supporters, Prague sends into all the German districts emissaries charged with discrediting him, by asserting that he is in the pay of the Germans, that his struggle for autonomy is only a simple camouflage, and that his real objective is attachment to the Reich. It is astonishing that men as shrewd as Hodja and Benes could have committed such a blunder, for it is enough for their agents to speak ill of Henlein to make him popular in the eyes of the Germans. Far from harming him, their assertions send his rating soaring.

How can one be surprised then if the elections are a triumph for the Sudeten Party? From the first round, it gathers about 90 percent of the German votes. It is more than an election: a true plebiscite. Far from being in decline, Henlein's popularity has never been so great. He takes advantage

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The Paris Bureau will have only limited activity. But the London Bureau will soon exercise a not insignificant influence on the British press and public opinion, thanks to its contacts with the Times, Lord Rothermere's Daily Mail, and with certain influential personalities such as Lord Noel-Buxton. All Sudeten propaganda in England will consist in establishing a parallel between Czechoslovakia and Ireland; between the Sudetenland and Ulster. This argument will strike the English very strongly.

[[PDF page 246]]

of this additional authority to strengthen relations he has already secretly established with the Government of Budapest and with Monsignor Hlinka, the leader of the Slovak autonomists.

After that, what can the Prague Government do, except resume the negotiations where it left them? Without waiting for the final result of the elections, it lets Henlein and Frank know that it is ready to begin new talks. It announces to them that it is prepared to make certain concessions, but that it refuses

to depart from the proportionality of the parties, which is the very negation of the Karlsbad program.

“We can negotiate for some time yet,” Frank answers them angrily, “but know that the patience of the Sudetens has limits!”

Henlein, for his part, turns the discussion toward reparation for the damages caused to the Sudetens since 1918, for this is, in his eyes, the best way to put the Czechs in the wrong. The Czechs are not unaware of it. That is why they approach this subject only with great reluctance...

Yet the next day, at the resumption of the talks, the Czechs show themselves much more accommodating. They go so far as to recognize the validity of certain demands formulated by Henlein. He suddenly fears that they will accept his conditions wholesale. That would be much more embarrassing for Hitler than a rupture. Henlein rushes to Obergruppenführer Lorenz, the head of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, to seek his advice.

“What should I do,” he asks him, “if, under foreign pressure, the Czechs were to grant all my demands, requiring in return my entry into the Government?”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Cf. Benes's speech at Tabor on 21 May 1938, where he insists on “the intangible character of party proportionality,” and Mr. Hodja's interview in Paris-Soir on 27 May 1938, where the Czech Prime Minister returns at length to this question.

4. By revealing to international opinion — which is totally unaware of it — the severity of their policy of “de-Germanization.”

5. On 25 May, Ward Price obtains an interview with Henlein in which the latter allegedly told him: “I shall demand, to begin with, total autonomy; if Prague refuses, I shall demand a plebiscite; if Prague refuses again, Hitler will undertake direct action.” This declaration, appearing in the Daily Mail, has the effect of a bombshell. The S.d.P. immediately protests against the disclosure of this “confidence.” But it does not deny the material accuracy of the remarks attributed to Henlein.

[[PDF page 247]]

The two men remain perplexed. This is an eventuality they had not foreseen. Finally, after a moment of reflection, Henlein finds the solution:

“If the Czechs grant me everything I ask of them, I shall answer yes. But I shall then require that they change their foreign policy. And that, I am certain Benes will never accept!”

Things will not go that far, however. For during the days that follow, the Czech Government will find itself grappling with another problem.

30 May marks the twentieth anniversary of the Pittsburgh agreement, concluded in 1918 between President Masaryk and the leaders of Slovak immigration in the United States. A delegation of more than one hundred American Slovaks, led by a young physician from Pittsburgh, Dr. Hl'etko, goes to Prague to commemorate this event. It lands on 26 May at Gdynia, in Poland, bringing with it the original text of the agreement, which most Slovaks regard as their Gospel. Two delegations coming from Czechoslovakia go to meet it. One — official — is presided over by Mr. Slavik, the Czechoslovak

ambassador in Warsaw; the other — unofficial — is led by the most prominent members of the Slovak People's Party, of autonomist tendencies: Senator Buday and Deputy Carol Sidor. The Poles see in this dualism an excellent opportunity to display their anti-Czech sentiments. The “Friends of Slovakia,” a Polish organization, go to salute the American delegation as it disembarks. Its president, Senator Gwizdz, gives a very violent speech in which he calls the Czechoslovak State a “fiction” and denounces “the countless violations it has inflicted on the Treaty of Pittsburgh.” Taken by surprise, Dr. Hl'etko does not know what to answer. He confines himself to saying “that he is going to Prague not to destroy the bonds of friendship between Slovaks

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. This would amount to denouncing the assistance pacts with France and the U.S.S.R.

3. On the incidents of this journey, see: Documents on British Foreign Policy, I, 364; F. Kabanek, Benes contra Beck, p. 15; Robert Novak, Der Künstliche Staat, p. 296 ff.; Léon Noël, L'Agression allemande contre la Pologne; une ambassade à Varsovie, p. 61.

[[PDF page 248]]

and Czechs, but to strengthen them.” His words are greeted with boos.

In Warsaw, his situation is hardly more enviable. Mr. Slavik's delegation is received coldly, that of Senator Buday with exceptional honors. It is dragged from receptions to military ceremonies, and from parades to banquets. But it is when he arrives in Czechoslovakia that Dr. Hl'etko has the impression of walking on burning coals. Having realized on the spot that the situation is very different from what he believed before his departure from the United States, he perceives that he must hold the balance evenly between the governmental party and opposition circles. To do this, he must find kind words for Prague, but also for Ružomberok, the residence of Monsignor Hlinka. In spite of all his good will, his speeches satisfy no one, for in both camps tempers are very high.

On 5 June, a Congress of Slovaks is held in Bratislava. It takes place entirely under the sign of autonomy and, before separating, adopts a motion demanding a recasting of the Constitution. The Slovaks favorable to the Government reply the next day by organizing a gathering of peasants belonging to the Agrarian Party. Mr. Hodja speaks there, to deny Monsignor Hlinka the right to speak in the name of the Slovak people. The day after that, it is learned that the Slovak People's Party plans to seize the International Court of Justice at The Hague with a complaint enumerating all the violations suffered by the Treaty of Pittsburgh.

This dispute reveals the depth of the gulf that has been dug for some time between the Government of Prague and an important fraction of the Slovak population. It confirms, in foreign opinion, the impression that Czechoslovakia is indeed an “artificial State” doomed to disappear if it does not reform itself radically. The margin of maneuver available to Mr. Hodja narrows still further, at the moment when he would need his entire freedom of action more than ever...

[[PDF page 249]]

XII

HITLER GIVES THE ORDER TO BUILD THE SIEGFRIED LINE

“I am at your side. Tomorrow you will be my Statthalter!” It was with these words that Hitler took leave of Henlein. Two months have passed since then — two months during which Hitler has not moved. Henlein is beginning to find the time long. He is on a tightrope and fears that his links with Berlin will end by becoming known.

Hitler is unaware of none of his difficulties. But he puts them in their true place, which is not the first. He has fixed his intervention for 1 October and will not budge from it. He will give the Wehrmacht the order to march only when he has all the trumps in his hand. Now these trumps — whatever Henlein may think — he does not yet have.

No doubt the internal disintegration of Czechoslovakia has increased during recent months. No doubt Henlein's last journey to London has strengthened among the English the desire to see the Sudeten affair settled by negotiation. But the bonds uniting England to France and France to Russia are not yet loosened, and as long as they are not, a French reaction remains possible. The surest way to discourage it is to erect, from Switzerland to the North Sea, a powerful fortified zone along Germany's western frontier. This barrier, which will extend opposite the frontiers of Belgium and Holland, will protect the right flank of the Reich in the event of conflict with Czechoslovakia, as the remilitarization of the Rhineland protected it at the moment of the Anschluss. A first line of fortifications has already been built. But it is still insufficient. It must be reinforced if it is to play its deterrent role fully. That is why, on 28 May,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. On that day he will no longer be able to negotiate with Prague, and the English leaders will have lost confidence in him.

[[PDF page 250]]

Hitler issues the order to intensify the work, to echelon it in depth, and to complete it in the shortest possible time.

Usually this kind of construction is carried out in the greatest secrecy. This time Hitler gives this undertaking the maximum publicity, for he wants to impress the French General Staff.

“I took very important measures on 28 May,” he will say on 12 September at the Nuremberg Congress. “First: I gave the order considerably to develop the Army and the Luftwaffe. Second: I gave the order to construct fortifications in the west.

“Since 28 May, the greatest work of all time, in the matter of fortifications, has been under way. I have charged Dr. Todt, Inspector General of Reich works, with its execution. I shall give you some figures on this subject.

“The fortification works, begun already two years ago, now employ 278,000 workers, plus an additional contingent of 84,000 workers, plus 100,000 men of the Labor Service, plus a certain number of engineer battalions and infantry divisions. Without speaking of the materials brought to the work site by other means of transport, the Reich Railways alone devote to it 8,000 wagons per day. The quantity of gravel used daily amounts to more than 100,000 tons.

“These fortifications will be finished by the end of this winter. But even now their defensive power is fully assured. When they are completed, they will comprise in all 17,000 armored and concrete works.

Behind this barrier of steel and concrete, which includes three and, in certain

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. It was probably on that day that Hitler took “the irrevocable decision to crush Czechoslovakia,” a decision that he communicated to Keitel two days later, 30 May. (See above, p. 229.)

2. Exactly 65 engineer battalions and divisions drawn from the three army corps stationed in the west: the VIth Corps at Münster, the XIIth Corps at Wiesbaden, and the Vth Corps at Stuttgart.

[[PDF page 251]]

NETHERLANDS
State boundaries
German fortified zone
German air defense zone
Maginot Line
Kilometers: 60 80 100

THE FORTIFIED ZONE ERECTED ON THE WESTERN FRONTIERS OF GERMANY

[[PDF page 252]]

parts, four lines of defense, stands the whole German people in arms.”

General Bodenschatz, Göring's deputy, did not wait until then to inform Colonel Stehlin of the construction of the “Westwall.”

“You know Germany's good intentions toward your country and its will to avoid any conflict with it,” he told him on 30 June, at the end of a dinner at the French Embassy. “The Reich Government wished to give material form to its peaceful intentions by establishing a line of defense all along its frontiers, from the North Sea to Switzerland. It is essentially a question of covering ourselves on the western side by a multitude of concrete shelters, sufficiently resistant to be protected against the largest calibers. Each shelter will have a garrison of about twenty men, equipped with anti-tank weapons. The defended zone will be organized to a depth of fifty kilometers.”

After giving other details on the construction of the fortified line and the size of the labor force employed there, General Bodenschatz resumes the arguments he invoked at the beginning of his conversation. He affirms that the German Government has taken this decision to ensure its freedom of action in the east, first by eliminating the Czechoslovak danger on its southern flank, then by eliminating the Soviet peril threatening all Europe. These actions will allow the Reich to acquire the living space indispensable to its existence and prosperity. As for the limits that the Führer will assign to this undertaking, which will allow the Germans to dispose of the riches of Ukraine, so poorly exploited and used, it is still too early to say. But in any event, the West should not take umbrage at it.

“We have no sort of aggressive intention against France,” Bodenschatz continues, “and of course we in no case seek to attack Great Britain... The construction of a fortified zone in the west is, I repeat, the material expression of our friendly dispositions

1. Closing speech of the Nuremberg Congress, 12 September 1938.

[[PDF page 253]]

toward your country. Besides, in what way could France interest us? The density of its population is comparable to that of Germany. Now what we are seeking is economic space. Your mission is African. You found overseas what you judge necessary to your needs. Our mission, we Germans, is European. By eliminating the Soviet danger, we contribute to your security and, from the human point of view, we assure the populations we shall have associated with us a standard of living incomparably higher than that which they have today."

In speaking thus, Bodenschatz obeys both a sincere conviction and the directives of his chiefs. The latter want to dissuade France and England from intervening in favor of Czechoslovakia by making them feel directly the futility of the military effort they might deploy.

It is true that the defense zone does not yet correspond to what Hitler asserts. (It does not seem that its construction can be finished before autumn 1939.) It is also true that it will not have the absolute defensive power attributed to it by its builders. But it is none the less certain that, in a few months, it will represent an impassable barrier to infantry units. Even supported by accompanying tanks, these will smash themselves against its concrete casemates. Armored divisions would be needed to pierce this carapace. Now the French Army has none. An assault air force would be needed to cross it by flying over it. France does not possess one either. The French Air Force is virtually

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3. "On the day when the Germans invade Bohemia and seek to obtain decisive successes at once," General de Geffrier, French military attaché in Berlin, writes in one of his reports to the Minister of War, "our armies risk finding themselves engaged in a true war of position, and only air operations will be able to weigh effectively in the general battle."

4. It will be endowed with the first two only on 16 February 1940. (Charles de Gaulle, Trois Études, foreword, p. xxxix.)

5. "Our monthly production of aircraft," Paul Reynaud will say, "fell in 1937 from 65 to 35 machines, while that of our neighbors rose sharply: 350 for Germany and 200 for Italy." {La France a sauvé l'Europe, I, p. 437.} This is to say that, if a conflict breaks out at that moment, French aviators will have to fight 1 against 10, with machines much less modern than those of their adversaries.

[[PDF page 254]]

nonexistent in relation to the Luftwaffe. And even if this were not the case, the zone of land fortifications will soon be doubled in depth by an air-defense zone, furnished with fighter squadrons and bristling with anti-aircraft batteries, which will extend from Wilhelmshaven to Mannheim, and from Mannheim to Constance. There is enough there, after all, to give pause...

Toward the beginning of July, Hitler seems to have acquired the conviction that France and England will not move. On 7 July, he brings together at the Chancellery Generals Keitel and Jodl, to give them the "General Strategic Directives" concerning the operations he is planning:

"There is no danger of a preventive war against Germany by foreign Powers," he tells them. "The

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. At the end of a detailed investigation, during which he compared the most authoritative sources, the economist Alfred Sauvy arrived at the following figures concerning the number of aircraft delivered to the State:
Years

[[PDF page 255]]

settlement of the Czech question by a decision I shall have taken personally and freely is the immediate object of my thoughts. I am resolved, beginning on 1 October, to take advantage of every political opportunity that may present itself to attain this objective. However, I shall decide to march against Czechoslovakia only if I am firmly convinced — as I was during the occupation of the Rhineland and the entry into Austria — that France will not move and that, consequently, Great Britain will not intervene either. The preparations of the Wehrmacht must therefore cover:

A. Complete preparations for action against Czechoslovakia (Plan Green);

B. Maintenance of Operation Red (strategic concentration with main effort toward the west);

C. Special preparations intended to meet various eventualities that might arise during execution of Plan Green;

D. Preparatory measures for the case in which the territory of Germany should suddenly be violated, inadvertently or with hostile intent, by a foreign Power.

“These four points lead me to prescribe the following directives:

AS REGARDS POINT A:

The directives given on 30 May 1938 by order OKW no. 42/38 remain in force.

AS REGARDS POINT B:

Since even a war unleashed against us by the Western Powers must begin with the destruction of Czechoslovakia, preparations for a war with the Army's and Luftwaffe's main effort against the west cease to have primary importance. The preparations made to date for Operation (Red) must nevertheless remain in being. As regards the Army, the preparations for Plan Red will contribute to camouflaging and masking the other strategic deployment. As regards the Luftwaffe, they will serve, on the one hand,

[[PDF page 256]]

as a system for shifting the main effort from east to west; on the other, as a preamble to the future eventualities of a war in the west.

It will belong to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army to decide to what extent the strategic Red deployment prepared by the O.K.H. should be brought to the knowledge of subordinate commanders.

AS REGARDS POINT C:

It is impossible to foresee the turn the political situation will take during the execution of Plan Green, or at the moment of its conclusion. It is therefore necessary to sketch theoretical plans and combinations in anticipation of various possible eventualities, so as not to be caught unprepared. These studies will have the object of answering the following questions:

1. What should we do if — contrary to our forecasts — other States nevertheless intervened against us during the execution of Plan Green?

2. What will have to be done when Operation Green is finished?

3. Are there eventualities likely to occur independently of Plan Green?

Reference 1:

a) France: If France intervenes against us during the execution of Plan Green, the measures provided for Operation Green will nevertheless come into force. In this respect, it is a question of firmly holding the western fortifications until completion of Operation Green enables us to recover the forces that will have been committed there.

b) England: If France were supported in its action by Great Britain, this aid would scarcely influence, at the beginning, land operations. The Luftwaffe, the Navy, and the OKW (War Economy service, Abwehr, etc.) nevertheless have the duty to make forecasts in their respective spheres.

c) The U.S.S.R.: Among the Powers of eastern Europe, Russia is the one whose intervention is most probable. This intervention will probably consist, at the beginning, in reinforcing Czech aviation and supplying armaments. Careful thought must also be given to the methods to be employed if Russia came to make war on us herself at sea and in the air, or if she wished to penetrate into East Prussia by passing through the Baltic States.

d) Poland: If we happened to be attacked by

[[PDF page 257]]

Poland, we should defend the fortifications of the east and of East Prussia with the Frontier Guard (Grenzschutz) and other formations, until the conclusion of Operation Green had restored our freedom of movement.

Reference 2:

If Operation Green takes place as early as this year, we must be in a position to bring a reserve strategic concentration into action immediately after its conclusion.

It will be important, with the aid of the Wehrmacht, to ensure the protection of the German frontiers — including the new ones — while keeping at our disposal the bulk of the field army and the Luftwaffe.

We should have the possibility of engaging, on one front or another, all the strategic concentrations that would have been assigned to the protection of the frontiers.

Reference 3:

If a Polish-Lithuanian conflict were to break out, Germany would not hesitate to occupy the territory of Memel by sudden action. The projects relating to this eventuality must be based on the directives given on 18 March 1938 (OKW, no. 472/38. Gen. Kommandos, L, Ia).

AS REGARDS POINT D:

If, in peacetime, the territory of Germany is suddenly violated by surprise and with hostile intent by a foreign Power, armed resistance will be offered without waiting for a special order.

The chiefs of the three arms must therefore authorize their competent commanders on the frontier and on the coasts to take, on their own authority, if the eventuality occurs, all measures necessary to resist the enemy.

However, even if this eventuality occurs, the frontier of the German Reich must in no case be crossed by our troops or our aviation, nor the territory of any foreign country violated without an order from me.

Without an order from me, the following will not be considered a

1. Since Poland's occupation of the city of Wilno in 1920, there had been no diplomatic or consular relations between Poland and Lithuania. The frontier between the two countries had remained closed. On 11 March 1938, a serious incident occurred on the frontier. On the 17th, the Polish Government sent Lithuania a forty-eight-hour ultimatum, demanding the resumption of normal diplomatic relations. That same day, an enormous crowd massed before the War Ministry in Warsaw and called for Marshal Rydz-Śmigły with cries of: “Marshal, lead us to Kovno!” (Kovno is the Polish name for Kaunas, the capital of Lithuania.) On 19 March, Lithuania yielded. The conflict was narrowly avoided. But Polish-Lithuanian relations remained tense, and a war between the two countries could break out at any moment.

[[PDF page 258]]

violation of German territory: the fact that sentries or isolated patrols cross the frontier either inadvertently, accidentally, or as a result of excessive zeal by a subordinate commander; nor, for aviation, overflight of the territory as a result of a navigational error; nor, for warships, entry into German territorial waters.

“The present directives,” Hitler concludes, “have as their object the common part of preparation for war and the general strategic principles applicable to the opening of hostilities. They will be supplemented, according to the needs of each strategic group, by instructions relating to questions of a special and administrative character. As for the directives concerning the conduct of the war itself, they will be given, in each case, by me personally.”

When these directives, duly countersigned by Keitel, Jodl, and Zeitzler, are transmitted to the General Staff, they provoke there a feeling of stupefaction. Accustomed to functioning with the precision of clockwork, the experts of the Bendlerstrasse are painfully surprised by the reading of a document that strikes them as much by its gaps as by its contradictions. They see in it a monument of imprecision, an amateur's work, and these words in their mouths amount to the worst of condemnations. How can

Hitler reconcile his opening assertion: “I shall decide to march against Czechoslovakia only if I am firmly convinced that France will not move,” with maintenance of the arrangements provided for facing a war in the west? How can he launch all his forces against Czechoslovakia while he does not exclude the possibility of being attacked simultaneously by France, England, Poland, or Russia? Is he not sure of what he asserts? And if events contradicted his forecasts? Do generals conscious of their responsibilities have the right to stake the whole future of their country on one individual's prescience? This thought alone is enough to fill them with dread. All the more since this document swarms with incoherences. How ensure the protection of the German frontiers while keeping available the bulk of the field army and the Luftwaffe? How draw up a serious operations plan that takes account both of the abstention of enemy forces and of their entry into action?

[[PDF page 259]]

These directives, which want to foresee everything — down to the excessive zeal of an unknown corporal — do not foresee the essential thing: what will happen if France, England, and Russia actually attack. Must one conclude that Hitler is resolved to crush Czechoslovakia whatever may happen, even if that must unleash a second world war?

The chiefs of the O.K.H. feel themselves placed before a terrible case of conscience. If they are convinced that this plan can only lead their country to disaster, does duty not command them to do everything possible to prevent its execution?

When, on 15 April, Hitler goes to Jüterbog to attend maneuvers, he sees in his entourage only anxious looks and gloomy faces.

“Gentlemen,” he says to a group of generals among whom are General von Brauchitsch, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, General Beck, Chief of the General Staff, General von Witzleben, commander of Wehrkreis III, and General Thomas, charged with the Army's economic services and motorization, “the decisive hour is approaching. I am unshakably resolved to settle the Czech problem by force of arms, and that as early as next autumn.”

A few officers show their approval. But the others are silent. In general, this announcement does not arouse the enthusiasm he expected.

Hitler has foreseen everything, except one thing: that certain members of his General Staff might refuse to follow him. Yet that is where matters have arrived.

[[PDF page 260]]

XIII

GENERAL BECK SEEKS TO PROVOKE THE RESIGNATION OF THE ARMY COMMANDERS

To tell the truth, this opposition is not new. Underlying events, it runs like an invisible thread through the whole history of the Third Reich. No doubt it remained confined to a very small number of individuals, whose importance was due above all to the posts they occupied. But it nevertheless expresses, in acute form, the intimate tragedy of the German High Command. If it assumes so intensely dramatic a character, that is because it arises as much from the clash of characters as from the incompatibility of the principles invoked on both sides. It should be examined under these different

aspects if one wishes to grasp all its significance.

Since the foundation of Prussia, the Army has always occupied a special position in the State, a position it succeeded in preserving when Prussia took the head of the German Empire. The Army General Staff — and it could only be the land Army, since the Navy and Aviation did not yet exist — considered itself not only the instrument of territorial unification, but also

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Recall Mirabeau's definition, which serves as the epigraph to the first volume of the present work: “Prussia is not a State that has an army; it is an army that has a nation.”

2. The German navy dates from 1890 and aviation from 1914. After 1935, it was customary to say in Berlin that the Army was Prussian, the Navy imperial, and the Luftwaffe National-Socialist.

[[PDF page 261]]

the guardian and director of conscience of the State. In spite of his resounding conflicts with the military, Bismarck had insisted on preserving their autonomy by placing them constitutionally above the parties and making them depend directly on the Sovereign. This privileged position, which sheltered them from the control of Parliament, had ended by engendering in them a natural propensity to regard themselves as a caste apart, superior to all the others, in whom was incarnated not the will of the people, but the historical and mystical destiny of the nation. A series of brilliant successes, won during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had anchored the General Staff in the feeling of its infallibility. Its members were convinced that they possessed “the secret of victory.” No doubt this certainty had in no way undermined their Spartan way of life, nor the deliberate modesty of their behavior. But it had infused into them a superb assurance and so high an idea of their historical mission that they had come to regard it as their duty to impose their views on the Sovereign in cases where he showed himself recalcitrant.

Thus in 1811 they had pushed Frederick William III, sword at his back, to resume the struggle against Napoleon; in 1848 they had dissuaded Frederick William IV from placing on his head a crown that the Frankfurt Parliament “had picked up from the mud”; in 1866, on the morrow of Sadowa, they had wanted to impose on William I the continuation of his victorious march on Vienna. It had required all Bismarck's tenacity to make them renounce it.

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2. “Do as I do,” Bismarck said to Prince Ito during the visit the latter made to him in 1875. “Insert into your Constitution a clause stipulating that your Army depends solely on the Emperor and escapes the control of Parliament and the political Cabinet. It is essential, in critical periods, that the military forces answer only to the Sovereign.” (See vol. IV, p. 48.)

3. Seven Years' War against France, Austria, and Russia (1756–1763), Wars of Liberation against Napoleon (1811–1815), war against Denmark (1864), war against Austria (1866), war against France (1870–1871).

4. “To be more than to seem” — Mehr sein als scheinen — was one of the mottos of the Great General Staff.

5. This attitude was nevertheless difficult to reconcile with the assertion, repeated a thousand times,

that in Prussia “soldiers did not do politics.” It would perhaps have been more exact to say that they made only one policy: their own.

6. “The mud,” that is, democratic principles.

7. See vol. IV, p. 368. “The task of the army is the destruction of enemy forces,” Bismarck said. “The designation and limitation of the objectives that must be attained by war are and remain, during as before the war, a political task.” They are the concern of the statesman, not of the soldier.

[[PDF page 262]]

It seems that the King of Prussia conceived a certain resentment from it, since five years later, in the Hall of Mirrors, he overwhelmed his generals with attentions and turned away from Bismarck, as if to show everyone clearly “that he was not one of theirs.”

In 1905, when Schlieffen had drawn up his campaign plans against France, he had warned the Emperor that German forces would be insufficient to face a war on two fronts, and had “invited” him to orient his policy so that this situation could not arise.

More recently still, the chief of the Great General Staff had arrogated to himself, on two occasions, the right to thwart the wishes of the Sovereign. On 31 July 1914, at the hour when William II was still hesitating to unleash war, Moltke had pushed Conrad von Hötzendorf, the Commander-in-Chief of the Austro-Hungarian Army, to show himself intractable toward the Serbs and to mobilize against Russia, which made the conflict practically inevitable. On 1 August, when William II had wanted to renounce marching on Paris in order to launch all his forces against the Tsar's Army (which would probably have enabled him to win the First World War), Moltke had formally opposed it by declaring that the Schlieffen plan was intangible and that, since general mobilization was under way, it was impossible to stop it.

When the First World War ends and revolution breaks out at Kiel and Berlin, the General Staff does not understand what is happening to it. It wonders whether it should not abandon the Reich in order to preserve Prussia, to which it is bound by far more powerful ties. The thesis of Reich unity prevails by a narrow margin. But through the “executive actions”

[[PDF page 263]]

of Maercker and Seeckt — which will indeed have the result of sparing the country total dislocation — the principal concern of the General Staff is to ensure its continuity by protecting the traditions that attach it to the past. Since the Sovereign has departed, it will tend quite naturally to substitute itself for him. Never will it admit that Parliament replaces him, that Parliament before which it has never bowed; never will it accept being subjected to civil power, that power for which it feels only undisguised disdain. Gravely traumatized by the revolution, it folds in upon itself and keeps, from the dreadful days when its own compatriots reduced it to impotence, more than a painful memory: a persistent dread.

From 1919 to 1933, the officers will serve in silence a regime they abhor and that they are determined to overthrow at the first opportunity. The moment when they feel most at ease is the one in which old Marshal Hindenburg returns to power, when he governs by relying on Article 48 of the Constitution, and when generals like Heye, Hammerstein, and Schleicher occupy the post of Minister of the Reichswehr. A mystical link is thus reestablished, on the margins of republican institutions, between the

officer corps, the General Staff, and the head of State. When Hitler enters the Chancellery borne by the acclamations of seventeen million voters, they let him act, convinced that his reign will be short and that they themselves will soon replace him at the head of the country.

But Hitler lasts. Not only does he last: he accumulates

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. “I see the honor of the Reichswehr,” General von Seeckt will say, “in the fact that it is absolutely impermeable to democratic ideas.”

2. “Something had been irreparably broken among the officers,” Wiedemann tells us, “on the day when Groener had said that the oath to the flag was nothing but an empty word. After 1918 they had served unwillingly a regime they disapproved of, and for which some felt even real hatred. There was something unhealthy and false in this situation. The officers who inwardly refused to take the oath to the Republic, while remaining in place, embodied a type of man unknown until then: soldiers who served no longer by ideal, but for money and for the consideration that their social position brought them.” {Der Mann der Feldherr werden wollte, pp. 258–259.}

3. Article 48, relating to the “state of exception,” gave full powers to the President of the Reich and allowed him to resort to armed force without prior consultation of Parliament. (See vol. I, p. 167, and vol. II, p. 318.)

4. Word for word, this situation amounts to a restoration of the Monarchy. It restores to the Army the “special situation” it enjoyed in the time of the Hohenzollerns.

[[PDF page 264]]

successes. Hindenburg's death removes the last obstacle still separating him from absolute power. Then the members of the Great General Staff question themselves. Where will he lead them? Entrenched in their offices as in a citadel, they strive not to be shaken by the clamors of his supporters. Certain that they are still “the conscience of Germany,” but fixed in a statism from which they will no longer escape, they watch for the first false step that will allow them to unseat him. What they know of his projects seems insane to them. But neither the reestablishment of compulsory service, nor the reoccupation of the Rhineland, nor the annexation of Austria has provoked sufficient turbulence to make him stumble. Now they think that the veto that foreign Powers will not fail to oppose to any attempt to settle the fate of Czechoslovakia by arms will inflict on Hitler the resounding failure that will finally allow them to rid themselves of him...

Hitler, for his part, has always treated them with caution. Convinced that they represent an irreplaceable force and grateful for the role of “maintainers of unity” they played during the Weimar era, he has constantly refused to attack their prerogatives. During the Munich putsch in 1923, when he clashed with the Reichswehr's VIIth Division, he took care to affirm to his judges “that he had never entered into conflict with the Reichswehr as such, but only with the VIIth Division, itself in a state of rebellion against the central authority.”

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1. “The countless testimonies gathered in recent days, emanating either from General Staff officers or from troop officers,” Kaltenbrunner will write to Bormann on 15 December 1944, “give a very clear idea of the ideology of the Wehrmacht, as it was systematically maintained in certain circles. This

ideology is founded on the conviction that the Wehrmacht is, within the Reich, an organism centered on itself and obeying only its own laws. This conception has a double origin: the position of the Army in relation to the King in the nineteenth century, and the position of the Reichswehr of 100,000 men with regard to the Weimar Republic. In the first case, the Army was above daily politics; in the second, it was apart. Under the National-Socialist regime, the Wehrmacht wanted to continue to occupy a position that would allow it to live 'according to its own laws.' The taking in hand of command of the Wehrmacht by the Führer, that is, by a man not belonging to the officer corps, who had not climbed all the rungs of the hierarchy one by one and — to say everything — who was not solely an officer, was felt, by a fraction of the military, as an attack on the specific laws of the Wehrmacht. Hence their conclusion that officers in general, and the General Staff in particular, had to exercise an all the closer control over the conduct of the war." {Spiegelbild einer Verschwörung, pp. 525–526.}

[[PDF page 265]]

When Röhm and his Assault Sections wanted to seize the Ministry of the Reichswehr by force in order to substitute a revolutionary army for the traditional cadres, Hitler stopped them at the gates of the Bendlerstrasse and ordered them to turn back. The shootings that bloodied the night of 30 June 1934 showed the fate he reserved for those who believed they could force his hand.

Later, during the reorganization of the High Command, in the course of which he eliminated Blomberg and Fritsch (4 February 1938), he did not wish to hand their succession to Göring. He himself assumed supreme command of the Wehrmacht and entrusted to Keitel the direction of the Armed Forces; to Brauchitsch, command-in-chief of the Army. By acting thus, he wished to remove the screen of rebellious generals and establish, with the Army, a direct contact he had not had before. When allusion is made before him to facts prior to February 1938, he willingly answers: "That was the time when Blomberg's broad back still interposed itself between the Army and me." Once this operation was over, Hitler believed that the chiefs of the Army would renounce their obstruction and docilely execute his orders. Nothing of the sort. Here opposition is reborn, all the more dangerous because the hour of decision approaches.

This time it gravitates around General Beck, the Chief of the Army General Staff, who enjoys great prestige among his colleagues because of his past, his functions, and his great moral elevation.

Born in 1880 at Biebrich on the Rhine, where his father directed an important metallurgical enterprise, Ludwig Beck has nothing of a Wallenstein, of whom Schiller tells us: "Ambition had raised him, ambition destroyed him." This son of conservative bourgeois climbed one by one all the rungs of the hierarchy thanks to the clarity of his intelligence and his tireless zeal. From 1911 onward he is in the General Staffs. During

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. On Göring's manifested desire to become chief of the Wehrmacht, see Fritz Wiedemann, Der Mann der Feldherr werden wollte, p. 112 ff.

[[PDF page 266]]

the winter of 1916–1917, he belongs to the army group of the Crown Prince, where he forms a friendship with General von der Schulenburg. After the defeat of 1918, he remains in the Reichswehr. Like Seeckt, he considers that the Army must keep itself apart from party struggle if it wants to continue to play its role as arbiter. Nevertheless, while a colonel at Ulm in 1929–1930, he intervened —

through esprit de corps — in favor of two young officers who had engaged in ardent National-Socialist propaganda in their units. General Groener wanted to dismiss him. He was prevented from doing so by General von Hammerstein. Promoted general, Beck is appointed commander of Wehrkreis VI at Münster, then, in October 1933, chief of the "Truppenamt," one of the key positions of the Reichswehr of the time, the one reserved for future commanders-in-chief. This function — which puts him in contact with all Army personnel and allows him to create a vast network of relations — places him at the center of German military activity. For the Truppenamt is not a service like the others: under cover of the administrative tasks with which it is officially charged, it is the sanctuary where the Great General Staff, dissolved by the Treaty of Versailles, continues its activity sheltered from indiscreet eyes.

When Hitler became Reich Chancellor, Beck gave him a favorable reception. He believed that he would be a chancellor "like the others," who would in no way meddle in Army affairs. But the massacres of 30 June and the oath formula imposed on the new Wehrmacht, which required absolute obedience to the person of the Führer (and not to the nation or the fatherland, as had been the case previously), shocked him deeply. Appointed Chief of the Army General Staff in 1935, he collaborated closely with General von Fritsch, whose bitter remarks confirmed him in his pessimism. The report of the secret military conference of 5 November 1937, transmitted to him by Colonel Hossbach — for the master of the Third Reich had not deemed it useful to invite him there — and, three months later, the slanderous accusations Hitler used to get rid of Fritsch, completed the making of him into an enemy of the

[[PDF page 267]]

regime. Convinced that Hitler will listen to no one's advice, but will follow his personal impulses more and more, he comes to consider that he must be overthrown as soon as possible, if one does not want him to lead Germany into the abyss.

All who have approached Beck praise his uprightness and his sense of responsibility. State Secretary von Weizsäcker sees in him "Moltke redivivus," and it is true that he strangely resembles the victor of 1871. The historian Friedrich Meinecke assures us that his affable refinement and the quality of his intelligence charmed all who entered into relations with him. General Speidel, who accompanied him to Paris during the visit he made to General Gamelin, was struck by the sureness of his eye and his power of analysis. But even his best friends are obliged to agree that his lucidity forbids him bold decisions. He never undertakes anything without having prepared, weighed, and put everything down in writing. He is a meticulous mind, tormented by scruples, "too much Clausewitz and not enough Blücher," as Ulrich von Hassell will say. Guderian has drawn an interesting portrait of him for us, because he shows us how his cautious character manifested itself even in his strategic conceptions. "Beck," he tells us, "was essentially a temporizer, in the military as well as the political domain. He was a paralyzing element wherever he appeared. He always foresaw all the difficulties and took a great deal of time to do the least thing. His much-vaunted theory of 'delaying defense' was characteristic of his way of thinking. Even before the First World War we had heard of it, and the Reichswehr of 100,000 men had erected it into a principle. Beck had extended it to all echelons of the Army, from great units down to rifle sections. But this way of giving battle is invariably marked by extreme confusion, and I have never seen it produce good results. The proof is that Fritsch himself abandoned it after the creation of armored divisions."

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1. See vol. IV, p. 319. "Since they met," Paul Reynaud will say, "one would say that the French and

German generals have signed a non-aggression pact among themselves."

2. The Reich ambassador in Rome, retired on 4 February 1938. The Germans called Blücher Marschall Vorwärts, Marshal Forward.

3. General Heinz Guderian, Panzer-Leader, pp. 32–33. And elsewhere: "He understood nothing of modern technique. When I described to him, in the liveliest colors, the advantages of armored formations, he confined himself to answering me: 'No, no! I do not want you; you are too fast for me!' And when I pointed out to him that radio made it possible to ensure command of formations despite their extreme mobility, he retorted skeptically: 'But come now! one cannot conduct a battle without map tables or telephone!'" {Erinnerungen eines Soldaten, pp. 20 and 26.}

[[PDF page 268]]

How could Beck, an eminently static and defensive mind, come to agreement with Hitler, in whom everything is assault, offensive, and fiery improvisation? "If in my youth I had let myself be stopped by all those who warned me that I was undertaking an impossible task," he will one day say to Bormann, "it is obvious that I would never have conquered power. I was alone, without friends, without party, and without troops. It seemed not impossible, but properly insane. And yet I succeeded. I made a new Reich arise from the ruins of the Republic. When the military have won a battle like that, I shall recognize their right to give me lessons!"

It is difficult to imagine two natures more dissimilar. Although Rhenish, Beck assimilated all Prussian rigor. He adopted not only its ethic, but its behavior. Emotion makes him close in upon himself and renders him so impassive that he appears disembodied. Hitler is a southern German, bubbling and eruptive, whose face reflects all his inner storms. Beck is a silent and thoughtful theorist; Hitler, an orator whose torrential eloquence makes crowds delirious and hurls them wherever he wishes by the sheer magic of the word. Beck is the son of well-to-do industrialists, who never had to suffer unemployment and misery. Hitler is the representative of the middle classes, mocked, underestimated, and ruined by the postwar period, to whom he restored hope, work, and their place in the nation.

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1. "Beck's traditionalist and conservative opinions prevented him from having the slightest understanding for the impetus and vitality of the National-Socialist Movement," Johannes Popitz, former Prussian Finance Minister, will say. {Spiegelbild einer Verschwörung, p. 118.}

2. Dr. Hans-Dietrich Röhrs attributes this mobility to a drop of Czech, or more exactly Gypsy, blood that Hitler supposedly inherited from a distant Central European ancestor. {Hitler, die Zerstörung einer Persönlichkeit, p. 67.}

3. This eloquence, precisely, is suspect to the military. No doubt it can modify the opinion of the masses, but not the situation on a battlefield. "Never has a speech transformed defeat into victory," they think. "In war things reveal themselves in their implacable reality, a reality on which words have no hold."

4. Gustav Noske, former lumberjack and first Minister of the Reichswehr under the Weimar Republic (see vol. I, p. 106), will not hesitate to say on 23 August 1944: "The social and legal condition of the German worker has become, in essentials, in conformity with the wishes I formulated when I was a young trade-union militant." {Spiegelbild einer Verschwörung, p. 296.}

[[PDF page 269]]

If there were only psychological contrasts between them! But to the clash of characters is added an antagonism of principle, due to an opposed conception of the Army's role.

When Hitler decided to constitute the O.K.W., Beck refused to see in it anything but “the military office of the politician Hitler.” Why? Because he believes that the only General Staff worthy of the name is the O.K.H., that is, the High Command of the Army, over whose destinies he has presided since 1935 and which is directly descended from the old Truppenamt.

Is it ambition that makes him speak thus? Not at all. Beck is above such personal considerations. His attitude derives from a series of analyses that form a whole in his thought.

Germany is essentially a continental Power. That is why the Army has always occupied there a preponderant place, to which neither the Navy nor Aviation can pretend. These two latter arms have only a secondary role: it consists in supporting and prolonging land operations. Hitler and Beck agree on one point: namely, that “the Army is the determining factor of German policy.” But from this they immediately draw opposite conclusions. For Beck, it is for the Army to wage war. It is for the Army — and not for political power — to draw up campaign plans and take all decisions concerning their execution. Since the Army is the decisive and ultimate instrument — beyond which there is nothing — policy must adapt itself to its capacities. In other words, the possibilities of the Army impose on policy a limit that the latter must never overstep.

For Beck this reasoning has the value of an axiom, and that is why he cannot depart from it. But for Hitler it

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
3. Oberkommando des Heeres. In German, the word Heer (Army) is used to designate exclusively the land Army.

4. Popitz will accuse Beck of considering aviation only “as extended artillery,” and of having an out-of-date conception of modern strategy. {Kaltenbrunner Berichte, pp. 115 and 117.}

5. Jodl, in his Journal, attributes this formula both to Hitler and to Beck.

[[PDF page 270]]

is inadmissible. Not only would it have the effect of subordinating the Reich's policy to the restrictive assessments of the Chief of the General Staff, but it runs counter to his most intimate convictions. Having set out too late for the conquest of the world, the German nation does not possess the space corresponding to its demographic power. Since foreign countries will not give it this space as a gift, it must conquer it or resign itself to being nothing more than a secondary Power, with, as corollary, an irreversible descent toward decline and death. Nevertheless, there remains for it one last chance of escaping this: to open for itself the fertile plains of Russia, whose exploitation will assure it a thousand years of labor, prosperity, and happiness.

Certainly Hitler does not claim this is an easy task. He knows that it will require considerable sacrifices and that his compatriots will arrive at it only at the cost of an immense effort. But to assert that

Germany cannot win this struggle, to claim that it is incapable of putting on foot the military instrument indispensable to its survival, is to doubt its courage and its creative capacities. It is to admit that the Germanic race may not be equal to the mission assigned to it by its Creator. A sacrilegious proposition, which could not even brush his mind...

Here the drama reaches its maximum scope. If Hitler wants to place, in all the key posts of the O.K.H., generals who blindly obey his orders and share his faith in the final victory of Germanism, it is because he envisages a war he is sure of winning. If Beck refuses to let go of the tiller and clings to it with all his strength, it is because he wants to prevent a war that he is convinced is lost in advance.

That is why the Chief of the General Staff manifests such lively emotion when he learns, on 22 April 1938, that Hitler has summoned Keitel to notify him of his intention of finishing with Czechoslovakia and to charge him with working out an operations plan to that effect. For Beck, these are not empty words, nor a conventional staff study such as General Staffs are accustomed to prepare from time to time: it is proof that Hitler has decided to move to action. Since the Führer never consults him

[[PDF page 271]]

(which, moreover, wounds him deeply), and since he has no service link with him, he can reach him only through written reports, which he asks General von Brauchitsch kindly to give to him. Taking up his pen, he immediately drafts a detailed Memorandum in which he enumerates all his reasons for anxiety:

Berlin, 5 May 1938.

Examination of Germany's present situation from both the political and military point of view.

I

1. England and Italy have just concluded an agreement that momentarily frees Great Britain from any concern about an armed conflict with Italy and removes the threat that hung over its shortest sea link with the Indian Ocean and the Far East.

2. The turn taken by Japanese operations in China has considerably diminished Japan's offensive power. These two facts relieve England of the worries caused by the defense of its Far Eastern positions and give it a correspondingly greater freedom of maneuver in Europe. It goes without saying that Russia too is interested in Japan's weakening.

3. France and England have renewed contact with a view to coordinating their action against Germany. Both have taken measures to accelerate their rearmament. A situation is thus created that resembles, in more than one respect, that which existed before 1914.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Beck spoke personally with Hitler only once in his life, and for five minutes: on the occasion of working out the plan for the invasion of Austria. Even that meeting was due only to the unexpected absence of General von Brauchitsch. (See vol. IV, pp. 513–515.)

2. As chief of the O.K.H. — that is, Commander-in-Chief of the land Armies — General von Brauchitsch is Beck's hierarchical superior, Beck occupying, beside him, the functions of Chief of

Staff.

3. Betrachtungen zur gegenwärtigen mil.-politischen Lage Deutschlands (summary). Before dying, Beck handed all his papers to his friend Wolfgang Foerster, the head of the Army's historical service, who published them in 1953. We reproduce here, with some abridgment, the text published by Foerster, which does not appear in the Nuremberg Archives.

4. This is the “Easter agreement,” signed on 16 April 1938. Concluded too late, this agreement was not to bear all the fruit that the British Government expected of it. (See vol. IV, p. 593.)

5. Since November 1937, the Japanese have plunged into China. In 1938, they occupy two million square kilometers of it and seem destined to get bogged down there. (See vol. IV, pp. 73–74.)

[[PDF page 272]]

4. Italy has muted its imperial aspirations. The reasons do not appear clearly, but this attitude could lead to a loosening of its ties with Germany.

5. Russia must be considered an increasingly irreducible enemy of Germany. Everything suggests that its navy and aviation will participate from the beginning in a war against the Reich. One must also reckon with the participation of its land forces if the war is prolonged.

6. The attitude of Belgium and Holland depends on that of France and England. They may be led to renounce their neutrality in the event of a long war.

7. No change is to be hoped for in the reserved attitude of Romania, Yugoslavia, and Poland. It must nevertheless be foreseen that in the long run the Powers hostile to Germany will exert on them a pressure that will lead them to take sides against the Reich. The same applies to the Baltic Countries.

II

1. England's interests are not the same as those of the other continental Powers. That is why London has always tried up to now to avoid a war on the continent. But a contrary tendency is beginning to emerge there. British rearmament is making rapid progress. Anti-German currents of opinion have been strengthened there since the months of February and March. They tend to transfer to Germany the hostility manifested until now toward Italy.

2. France too aspires to peace; or, to put it better, it recoils from war. But this repugnance has limits. France has always united against an external danger. The Anschluss was felt by many French circles as a new Sadowa. As long as it exists, the promise of assistance given by France to Czechoslovakia is for it a question of honor. It should not be difficult for a solid government to rally all opinion to it. France will not succumb to Bolshevism, although its internal difficulties may still worsen. The French Army is intact and remains, until further order, the strongest on the continent. Daladier's recent conversations

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. That is, since Schuschnigg's visit to Berchtesgaden and the entry of German troops into Vienna.

[[PDF page 273]]

in London have strengthened the position and resolution of the Government. More than ever, the two policies, French and British, will follow parallel paths. If France intervenes in favor of Czechoslovakia, England will join it, and that from the first day.

3. The fright that England and France feel before a war likely to provoke human hecatombs will lead these two countries to seek new strategic formulas (war at sea and in the air, land operations with limited objectives, such as the reoccupation of the left bank of the Rhine). England's voice will play a preponderant role in the choice of these formulas. These two countries will sacrifice Czechoslovakia if necessary (as was the case for Serbia in 1914), while intending to restore it at the end of a long war that will have transformed the face of the continent. To do this they will enjoy America's support, even if that support is limited to deliveries of arms, food, and raw materials.

III

1. It is certain that Germany's military situation has considerably strengthened when compared with the time when it was condemned to total impotence. It is nevertheless less strong than in 1914, because all the nations likely to take position against it have already partially or completely rearmed. Moreover, many years will still pass before the Wehrmacht is ready to wage war.

Situated in the middle of the continent, Germany does not have sufficient space to wage victoriously a war on land, at sea, and in the air. The economic situation is worse than in 1917–1918. This is an additional reason not to expose Germany to the dangers resulting from prolonged hostilities. But our adversaries will from the outset regard any European conflict as destined to be a long war, and they will take their arrangements accordingly from the beginning.

2. All hope is excluded of settling the Czech problem by arms during this year, thanks to an abstention by France and England.

No agreement on Czechoslovakia is possible without England's approval. If we draw England's enmity upon ourselves because of our behavior toward Czechoslovakia, we thereby lose a quantity of advantages that an England friendly disposed toward us would be ready to grant us, if not totally, at least in part.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. It seems that Beck means to allude to the restitution of colonies.

[[PDF page 274]]

England is preparing to throw its sword into the balance if Germany seeks to give the Czech problem a solution unacceptable to it. Although Anglo-German relations are no longer what they were in 1914, London will strive to set up a coalition stronger than we are. It will be able to dispose, for this, of France and Russia. America will join it, even if it provides, to begin with, only material aid. England still possesses formidable power, whatever may be said by those who minimize its world position. Once war is unleashed, the only decisive factor will be brute force. It is self-deception to believe that help will be brought to us for ideological reasons.

Because the road to Russia is closed to us, we have the right, from the military point of view, to require that, in the event of a European conflict, England should not be in the camp of our enemies. Yet it will inevitably be there if Germany seeks to impose on the Czech problem a solution that runs counter to its

will.

In other words, Beck's reasoning comes down to this: the policy pursued by Hitler leads infallibly to war; not to a localized war, but to a second world war, whose outcome can only be the total crushing of the Reich.

It is certain that these predictions will finally come true; that the war, once unleashed, will be long and implacable; that Germany will see arrayed against it the combined forces of France, England, America, and Russia, and that at the end of five years of dreadful struggle the Wehrmacht will be brought down. On this account one understands that this memorandum has been called a “somber prophecy, announcing all the misfortunes that were to fall upon Germany.” But its reading nevertheless provokes a feeling of unease, so much do truth and error rub shoulders in it.

Beck's prognosis is impeccable as regards distant deadlines. (Events will prove it.) But his diagnosis is false as regards the immediate situation. (Events will prove that also.) It is not true that the French Army is the strongest on the continent, nor that the Wehrmacht is incapable of making war for

[[PDF page 275]]

many years; it is not true that England is ready to throw its sword into the balance to defend Czechoslovakia; nor that Russia is resolved to intervene from the first phase of the conflict; nor that America will at once make itself the supplier of arms to the West. All this will become true, but it is not yet true. For the moment, France is in a state of total unpreparedness; England is disposed to many concessions in order to avoid conflict; Stalin, prey to serious uncertainties, is seeking the best means of diverting the storm from Russia; finally Roosevelt — whatever his inner preferences may be — is bound by the provisions of the Neutrality Act.

All this Hitler knows. Can the Chief of the General Staff be ignorant of it? The Reich Chancellor does not underestimate any more than he does the danger of a war on two fronts, nor the risks that a conflict of long duration would entail. If he multiplies offers of peace to France and England, is it not to have free hands in the east? If he insists that the Wehrmacht should finish off Czechoslovakia in four days, is it not to avoid a European crisis, which might occur if the conflict were prolonged? The war of which he thinks is not a stagnant war, but a series of lightning breakthroughs capable of rapidly bringing the enemy down. As for the assertion that Germany does not possess sufficient living space to escape the danger of encirclement, it could make him smile. Is that not what he himself never ceases proclaiming, and is that not the fundamental reason for his policy of expansion in the east?

But the reading of Beck's report does not make him smile: it brings his exasperation to a peak. How does the High Command not understand that this is the moment to go forward, that never will circumstances be more favorable? One does not unleash war when one is ready to wage it. One wages it when there exists a sufficient gap between the forces one possesses and those of the adversary. When will this margin of superiority be greater?

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. And it will not become so at all by the “force of things,” but as a result of errors that Hitler himself will commit and that neither Beck nor anyone else can foresee in 1938.

3. “As a matter of principle,” Hitler is accustomed to say, “the generals are never ready. They want ever more numerous arms, ever better

[[PDF page 276]]

It is enough to look at Europe to perceive that it is militarily half empty. Stalin has inflicted on the Red Army a purge that is not yet finished, but in which there have already perished 3 marshals out of 5, 75 members of the Superior War Council out of 80, the Commander-in-Chief of the Naval Forces, the inspectors general of aviation, of Osoaviakhim, of armored forces, of airborne troops, and of artillery; 13 army commanders out of 15; 57 corps commanders out of 85; 110 division commanders out of 195; 220 brigade commanders out of 406, and 30,000 junior officers, or about half the specialized cadres. A lost war would not have caused more ravages. Several years will pass before the Red Army recovers from this bloodletting.

France? It has swallowed up billions in its Maginot Line. But although it has adopted the two-year law, the effective strength of its active army does not even amount to half that of the Wehrmacht. Its Air Force, which possesses neither modern bombers nor assault aviation, is so inferior to the Luftwaffe that it could not contest mastery of the air. Finally, it has no armored division.

England has recently made a considerable effort to catch up its delay in the field of rearmament. On 7 March 1938 it voted a credit of 1,500 million pounds, which it devoted first of all to its aviation. But this is still only at the preparatory stage. Its first line of air defense, composed of 1,750 aircraft, will not be ready until March 1939. This figure cannot be brought to 2,370 aircraft until March 1940. At sea, its warships are outclassed by the battleships recently emerged from the shipyards

trained personnel, ever more perfected equipment, in order to arrive at an absolute superiority that will reduce to a minimum the risks inherent in any armed confrontation. In doing this, they take the army for an end in itself, and lose sight of the fact that its role is to ensure the nation's security. The concern for military preparation must never prevent you from seizing the political opportunity.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
4. The decree creating the first two French armored divisions will not be signed until 7 January 1940, that is, four months after the declaration of war, and even then with restrictions as to execution.

5. Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain, p. 350.

[[PDF page 277]]

of Italy and Japan. Singapore's fortifications are far from being completed. On land, its active army is less than 40,000 men. It has not restored conscription and is not even thinking of it.

The Czechoslovak army, for its part, is endowed with powerful armament, but its combat power is compromised by its moral disunity. Of the 13 million inhabitants contained in the country, there are scarcely 7 million on whom the Prague Government can count. A quarter of its effective strength is recruited among the minorities, which will revolt at the first cannon shot. As for the Slovaks, it is unlikely that they will struggle with much determination to maintain a state of affairs to which they are increasingly hostile.

As regards Hungary, it is from now on in Germany's camp. As for Poland and Romania, everything suggests that they will prefer to enter the war against Russia rather than let the Red Army penetrate onto their territory.

Italy remains. Endowed with a very modern air force and an imposing submarine fleet, its major asset is not its military value — concerning which opinions are reserved — but its geographical position. This causes many sleepless nights to the French General Staff. For if France wants to go to Czechoslovakia's aid, it will expose itself to having to wage war on the Rhine, in the Alps,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. On the naval construction programs of the Japanese and Italians, see vol. IV, pp. 45, 108, and 595. Beck is mistaken when he believes that the turn taken by Japanese operations in China relieves the English of every worry concerning the defense of their positions in the Far East. The conquest of China is conducted by the land Army. What worries the English is the Japanese navy. Now this is not engaged in the operations in progress.

5. The Czech core properly speaking, to which most of the Army cadres, the former Legionaries, and the Sokols belong. “The German military experts,” notes Mr. Maurice Baumont, “judged that the Czechoslovak Army, eaten away by nationality quarrels, was morally much less strong than the Polish Army, despite superior armament.”

6. From the beginning of hostilities, the Czech Army risks experiencing the fate of the old Austrian Army, where nationals of the “nationalities” (and notably the Czechs themselves) deserted en masse to join the enemy camp. This time the defectors will belong to the minorities.

8. The number of its aircraft amounts to 2,200. (See vol. IV, p. 596, note 3.) As for the submarine fleet, it numbers 106 submarines. (See vol. IV, p. 595.)

[[PDF page 278]]

in the Mediterranean, and in North Africa, which will oblige it dangerously to disperse its already insufficient forces.

Does the German High Command not realize, then, that the situation is exceptionally favorable to Germany and has no analogy with that before 1914? Does it want to wait before acting until Europe fills up with soldiers and guns? Or does it prefer passively to submit to events until the day when a hostile coalition once again imposes its will upon it?

“That is insane!” Hitler declares. “Instead of restraining me, my generals ought to beg me to go forward! After all, I do not ask them to understand my orders, but to execute them!”

Then, mastering his anger, he asks Brauchitsch:

“How many people have read this report?”

“Very few,” Brauchitsch answers. “Five or six at most...”

Reassured by the idea that Beck's memorandum is known only to a small circle of initiates, Hitler puts it aside with a shrug of his shoulders.

“This Beck is always the same,” he continues in a calmer tone. “A year before the Anschluss, did this bird of ill omen not predict to me that if I touched Austria, I would have to fight France,

Czechoslovakia, England, Belgium, Russia, Poland, Lithuania, who knows what else? Well, what happened?”

“Nothing,” answers Brauchitsch, who is plainly not at ease.

“Then remind him of it from me!” Hitler says, dismissing him.

After which, he sends for General Keitel to notify him that his decision to crush Czechoslovakia is irrevocable and to fix 1 October 1938 as the day from which the Wehrmacht must be ready for any eventuality.

“Clausewitz is right,” Beck says to himself. “War is only the continuation of politics by other means. If the Army does not want to find itself engaged in a war that it

HISTORY OF THE GERMAN ARMY, V: THE TRIALS OF STRENGTH (1938)
Benoist-Méchin

English translation — Section 6 of 10
PDF pages 279–326
Translation note: rapid, accuracy-focused translation from the corrected embedded text layer. No new OCR was performed. Page markers from the source text are preserved.

[[PDF page 279]]

condemns, it must never cease to exercise control over policy.”

Taking up his pen again, he undertakes a fresh examination of the situation. But however much he makes and remakes his calculations, he always reaches the same conclusions. It is false to claim that Germany is stronger than in 1914. Her economic situation is worse than in 1917–1918. No one disputes that the Führer has won great successes from 1933 to 1938. But that does not mean that fortune will always smile upon him.

Contrary to what he imagines, it is impossible to overcome Czechoslovakia in less than three weeks. Only on the fourteenth day will Germany be able to begin recovering forces in order to transfer them to the western front. In the meantime, the thin cordon of troops charged with protecting her in the west will have been the object of massive assaults by the French Army. It will resist them all the less because the construction of the fortifications is not sufficiently advanced. The fortified zone will quickly be pierced and the whole Reich opened to invasion. Even if the Wehrmacht wins the Bohemian campaign, it will nevertheless lose the war, because it will find itself facing a coalition composed of France, England, Russia, and America. A conflict unleashed under such conditions can end only in a European catastrophe.

But since these observations have had no more effect than the preceding ones, Beck decides to resort to stronger measures. On 16 July, he gives General von Brauchitsch a memorandum whose preamble reads as follows:

The Chief of the General Staff has already had the honor of making known to you, on 3 June, with

lengthy reasons, the grounds on which he finds himself obliged formally to decline any responsibility in the preparation and execution of the measures prescribed by the directives of 30 May 1938 (O.K.W., Ur 42138, Part II, Section 2), because of their superficial and insufficient character, at least as regards the Army.

Beck then takes up again and develops all the arguments he has already invoked in his previous writings. But he concludes with

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Hitler again summoned Keitel on 7 July to give him additional "general directives." (See above, pp. 250–254.)

[[PDF page 280]]

these words, which he has not yet used and which amount to a real formal warning:

In virtue of the considerations set forth above and fully conscious of the significance of this act, I urgently ask you to take the necessary steps with the Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht to induce him to renounce his preparations for war against Czechoslovakia until the military conditions have been radically transformed. I regard this enterprise as having no chance of success. This opinion is shared by all the Quartermasters-General subordinate to me and by all the members of my Staff who have been charged with preparing and conducting the war against Czechoslovakia.

Brauchitsch remains silent for a moment. Then he asks in a grave voice:

"What do you mean by that?"

"All the senior commanders of the Wehrmacht must present themselves as a body before Hitler in order to force him to give up his preparations for war."

"And if he persists in his intentions?" asks Brauchitsch.

"In that case, they must all tender their resignations to him."

"But what you are asking them to do is an act of collective insubordination!" exclaims Brauchitsch. "It borders on rebellion!"

Beck has foreseen this reaction from the Commander-in-Chief. Accustomed to leaving nothing to chance, he has noted on a sheet all the arguments capable of justifying this step. He hands it to Brauchitsch, who reads it attentively:

It seems that the Führer regards an armed settlement of the Sudeten problem as inevitable and that, for this purpose, he is determined to invade Czechoslovakia. He is being pushed into it by an entourage of irresponsible men and extremists. As regards Göring's attitude, opinions are divided. Some maintain that he has perfectly understood the gravity of the situation; others that he is playing a double game, as during the Blomberg

[[PDF page 281]]

and Fritsch affairs, and that he sides with the Führer when he is in his presence.

It is therefore for the senior commanders of the Wehrmacht to undertake this step. It is justified by the fact that the Wehrmacht is the supreme instrument of the State in everything concerning the conduct of war.

The stake is nothing less than the fate of the nation. These commanders would assume a terrible responsibility before history if they did not act in accordance with the commands of their conscience and of their professional experience. For a soldier, the duty of obedience ends when he is given an order incompatible with his conscience, his knowledge, and his sense of responsibility.

If the advice and warnings of the senior commanders of the Wehrmacht find no response in such circumstances, right and duty require them, before their people and before history, to resign their posts. If they all act thus, with a unanimous will, they will make war impossible. In doing so, they will have spared their fatherland the worst.

In an age such as ours, soldiers who occupy the higher levels of the hierarchy would lack moral greatness and discernment if they confined themselves within the framework of their military tasks and limited themselves to the role of executants, without taking account of their responsibilities toward their people as a whole. Exceptional times require exceptional acts.

Those who have the courage to act thus will be followed by other men, outside the Wehrmacht, who occupy high posts in the State. Whoever remains clear-sighted, does not let himself be deceived by erroneous figures, and refuses to succumb to the fumes of ideology is obliged to admit that we are not in a position to wage war, either from the military point of view (command, training of cadres, equipment), or from the economic point of view, or from the psychological point of view.

The idea of a lightning offensive that would bring us to Prague in two days is an insane dream. The whole history of modern war teaches us that sudden attacks have never produced lasting results. Our preparations in the west are sufficiently visible to induce our adversaries to take preventive measures against us.

“It goes without saying,” adds Beck, “that if this intervention succeeds in preventing the war, it will create grave upheavals inside the country. The extremist circles will cry out everywhere

[[PDF page 282]]

that the Führer’s plans have been defeated by the incapacity of the Wehrmacht and of its leaders. We shall be the object of every kind of defamation. We must therefore foresee that our step will lead to a serious reckoning between the Wehrmacht and the S.S.

“As regards the date of our action, everything suggests that the French and English Governments will address notes to the Reich during this summer, probably in August. These notes will no doubt be conciliatory in character. But they will be followed, within a short time, by a second note, which will have the character of an ultimatum and which will no longer leave room for retreat or compromise. In my view, the most favorable moment for making our move is immediately after receipt of the first note.”

Brauchitsch knew the pessimistic views of his Chief of Staff, but he had not thought that they would

drive him so far. It is obvious that if — from one day to the next — the whole Army found itself deprived of leaders, the launching of war would become impossible. But this act of insubordination is without precedent in the history of the German Army. Even the Council of War held at Spa on the morning of 9 November 1918, where the generals had advised the Emperor to renounce power and where Groener had pronounced the fatal phrase: “The Army is no longer behind His Majesty; the oath to the flag is only an empty word,” could not be compared with it, for Germany was then at the end of a lost war. Brauchitsch may well know that the operations Hitler has in mind involve certain risks; nevertheless, he hesitates to take the decisive step.

German historians have attributed his hesitation to the most varied causes. Some have asserted that he lacked character. Others, that he was under the influence of his second wife, who was fiercely pro-National Socialist. Still others, that he had not read Clausewitz enough. These

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. The same ties of confidence did not exist between Brauchitsch and Beck as between Beck and Fritsch. When Hitler entrusted Brauchitsch with command-in-chief of the Army, he imposed only one condition on him: that he accept without protest the departure of the Chief of the General Staff, should Hitler judge it necessary to replace him.

[[PDF page 283]]

arguments seem very slight when weighed against the gravity of the situation. If Brauchitsch hesitates to enter the path onto which Beck wishes to push him, it is because nothing has prepared him for an act whose consequences appear incalculable. It is by no means certain that all the generals will follow him. The General Staff, perhaps, but the unit commanders? As for the Kriegsmarine and the Luftwaffe, neither Raeder nor Göring will associate themselves with this step. Hitler has on his side the S.S., the Police, and the troops, into which the whole youth of the Party has been enrolled. As for public opinion, although attached to peace, it will find it inconceivable that a group of generals should have risen up against the Führer at the moment when he is preparing to liberate three and a half million Germans from Czech tutelage. “Why should I have marched against Hitler?” he will say seven years later before the Nuremberg Tribunal. “The German people had elected him and were entirely satisfied with his victorious policy.” Finally, Brauchitsch is not convinced that the predictions of the Chief of the General Staff are exact and that the operation against Prague must inevitably lead to a general war.

To Beck’s great disappointment, he asks for time to think...

*

“All the members of my Staff and the Quartermasters-General subordinate to me share my view,” Beck has asserted. “Those who act

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Fritz Wiedemann, who became one of Hitler’s aides-de-camp after having been his captain during the First World War, thinks not. “At that time,” he writes, “most of the generals regarded Hitler as a political genius, as a man upon whom ‘Fortune’ — in the Frederician sense of the word — smiled in all his enterprises, as a leader in whom one could have blind confidence. There was one thing for which every soldier thanked him from the bottom of his heart: having restored Germany’s military sovereignty. We, former combatants of the First World War, had endured the chains of the Treaty of Versailles as an affront, and Hitler undoubtedly had the whole people behind him on the day when he

broke them... I myself would have expected this gesture from anyone rather than from him, who had been the inconspicuous and somewhat odd dispatch runner of the Staff of the 16th Infantry Regiment." {Der Mann der Feldherr werden wollte, p. 99.}

2. Cf. Maurice Baumont, La Grande Conjuration contre Hitler, p. 14. Goerdeler himself, one of the regime's most determined adversaries, is obliged to admit "that Hitler's power rests on a formidable illusion," but that "this illusion is shared by 80% of the Germans." (Gerhard Ritter, Échec au Dictateur, p. 90.)

3. That is, Generals Wagner, von Stülpnagel, and von Manstein. The latter sharply criticized before Beck the disorder reigning in the High Command. But his attitude toward the conspiracy is much more nuanced. (Cf. Gert Buchheit, Ludwig Beck, p. 77.)

[[PDF page 284]]

thus will be followed by other men, outside the Wehrmacht, who occupy high posts in the State."

If the Chief of the General Staff has expressed himself thus, it is because he wishes to reassure Brauchitsch by proving to him that he will not be alone and that he knows he can count on a certain number of supports. General Adam, who succeeded him at the head of the Truppenamt; General Thomas, charged with the motorization of the Army, who is alarmed by the shortage of raw materials; General Heinrich von Stülpnagel, second Quartermaster-General; General von Witzleben, commander of Wehrkreis III (Berlin); General Friedrich Olbricht, chief of the Allgemeine Heeresamt; Colonel Oster of the Abwehr services, have not withheld their approval from him.

Around this circle of soldiers, who belong to the higher spheres of the Bendlerstrasse, other personalities have not concealed from him the anxiety caused them by the turn of events. Among them are Count Wolf-Heinrich Helldorf, S.S. Obergruppenführer and Police President of Berlin (who is on bad terms with Himmler); Herr Wagner, Gauleiter of Silesia; Professor Popitz, former Prussian Minister of Finance; Herr von Weizsäcker, State Secretary at the Wilhelmstrasse (who had hoped to succeed Neurath and does not forgive Hitler for having preferred Ribbentrop to him); Herr Ulrich von Hassell, former ambassador in Rome (who has been retired because of his opposition to the German-Italian rapprochement); Herr Erich Kordt, Legation Councillor at the Ribbentrop Bureau; finally — and above all — Carl Friedrich Goerdeler, former mayor of Leipzig, whom Göring appointed High Commissioner for Prices and who will become the traveling spokesman of the opposition.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Especially as regards gasoline and rubber, which must be replaced by synthetic products. Thomas, whom his colleagues familiarly call "General Motors," estimates that 80% of the strategic raw materials existing in the world are controlled by England, America, and Russia. He has not forgotten that the campaign undertaken by Mussolini in Ethiopia would have been stopped dead if the League of Nations had voted an embargo on petroleum products.

2. Oster had formerly been his Chief of Staff at Münster and still serves him as an information agent.

3. Himmler distrusts him and has him watched because of the very lavish style he maintains in the capital, where he possesses four apartments.

4. Concerning the instructions given to Kordt by State Secretary von Bülow when he entered the

Ribbentrop Bureau, see vol. IV, p. 323, note 4.

5. Goerdeler will make wide use of Göring's protection and of the journeys abroad which the head of the Four-Year Plan asks him to make.

6. Goerdeler goes to Brussels from 4 to 16 June 1937, where he is received by M. van Zeeland, President of the Council, and by King Leopold III. From 18 June to 15 July,

[[PDF page 285]]

If Beck opposes Hitler's policy because it risks imposing tasks on the Army beyond its means, Goerdeler, for his part, is hostile to the regime for economic reasons. The Germanic Empire of the East appears to him a utopia. For this liberal administrator, who desires a "regeneration of trade unionism," Germany can escape her isolation only by renouncing autarky and reintegrating herself into the great commercial currents of the world. His numerous journeys abroad have strengthened him in this conviction. In Brussels, he considers a plan for developing the Congo by means of mixed German-Belgian companies. In London, he pleads for the restitution to Germany of her former colonies.

This is a theme that British ears find little pleasure in hearing. Moreover, the mayor of Leipzig irritates his hosts by his assurance and loquacity. In April 1938, he takes advantage of a lecture he has been invited to give in a very closed club of the capital to criticize England's social and economic policy, denounce certain technical delays in her industry, and blame the one-sided orientation of her agriculture, so much so that Lord Stamp, who organized the session, cannot help showing his disappointment.

To the politicians he meets on the banks of the Thames, he explains that Hitler will not be long in biting the dust, that in order to accelerate his fall no right must be granted to any of his demands, but that, in order to enable his successors to make themselves popular, they will have to be granted rapidly everything that has been refused to their predecessor. During a conversation with Vansittart, he begins by delivering an acerbic criticism of the Reich government; then he undertakes to give political lessons to the Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office.

he is in England, whence he sends a first report to Göring and to Beck. At the end of July, he is in Holland. In August, he crosses France to go to Toronto (Canada), where he is received by Mackenzie King, the Canadian Prime Minister. From there, he goes to the United States, where he has conversations with Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Sumner Welles, former President Hoover, Morgenthau, the Secretary of the Treasury, Stimson, the Secretary of Defense, the economist Owen Young, and Wheeler-Bennett, with whom he stays for several weeks. Finally, in March–April 1938, he returns to London, where he gives several lectures. "It is surprising," writes Gerhard Ritter, "that Goerdeler could have succeeded in making contact so rapidly with so many important political personalities. I am assured that the lively intelligence and clear resolution of this ambassador of an 'other Germany' everywhere made a strong impression on his interlocutors — especially on Eden and Hull. His communications must have strengthened the great anxieties with which they had followed Hitler's adventurous policy since 1937." {Échec au Dictateur, p. 89.}

[[PDF page 286]]

Vansittart takes a lofty tone with him and shows him the door, telling him that his words amount to high treason.

To crown his clumsiness, Goerdeler says, during a small private meeting at the Bank of England, that he expects a putsch against Hitler soon and that he has already made contact, for this purpose, with General von Brauchitsch. When the echo of these remarks reaches the ears of the Commander-in-Chief, the latter shudders at the thought that Hitler might be informed of them. He rushes to the Chancellery to protest his good intentions and dispel any prejudice the Führer might have against him. Result: upon his return to Germany, Goerdeler is invited to place himself at the disposal of the Public Prosecutor. His activity is subjected to a close inquiry, lasting several months, which only a skillful intervention by Dr. Schacht succeeds in having interrupted. It is understandable, after that, that Brauchitsch feels bound to the most extreme reserve...

Painfully surprised by his chief's attitude, Beck returns to the attack on 19 July 1938. He insists on the necessity of a step by the generals and develops his plan for a "legal coup de force" that will free the country from the grip of the S.S. and the tyranny of the Party:

"If one decides to take the step in question and thus prevent the outbreak of war," he says to Brauchitsch, "one must examine all the political consequences of this act. It will result in a brutal confrontation with the S.S. and the Party bosses. This is no doubt the last time that destiny offers us the opportunity to free the German nation and its Führer from the nightmare of a Chekist regime that is destroying the moral health and welfare of the people and will bring communism back to us. To succeed in this operation,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Vansittart having told him that it would be necessary to find "a sort of autonomy for the Sudetens within the framework of the Czech State," Goerdeler replied: "The Sudetens are on the Reich frontier. It would be legitimate to incorporate them into it. But above all, follow a clear and firm political line, otherwise you will encourage appetites for what is not legitimate."

[[PDF page 287]]

a certain number of preliminary conditions are required. First of all, no doubt must be allowed to remain that our action is not directed against Hitler, but against a harmful entourage that is leading him to ruin. Next, a few influential but honest members of the Party must be taken into confidence. They must be informed of the gravity of the situation and convinced of the necessity of our intervention. I am thinking of Gauleiter Wagner in Breslau and of Bürckel in Vienna. The generals commanding the troops in Silesia and Austria would be the natural men to make contact with them, for example on the occasion of the forthcoming Athletic Festival to be held at Breslau. Nothing in our acts must give the impression of a plot. And yet it is indispensable that all the generals associate themselves with our action and support it to the end, whatever the consequences. It should even be possible to find a few Luftwaffe generals who would rally to our cause. Our watchwords must be brief and clear: For the Führer, against war, against boss-rule, for peace with the Church! We must demand the restoration of freedom of expression, the abolition of the police regime, the return to legality, the halt of construction on sumptuous buildings, and the intensification of workers' housing construction, in order to restore Prussian simplicity and morality everywhere."

What Beck does not say is that he has had General Heinrich von Stülpnagel draw up a plan for seizing the Chancellery by surprise, and that he has already made contact, for its execution, with General von Witzleben and Count Helldorf, who are respectively commander of the III Army Corps and Police President of Berlin.

Brauchitsch is on hot coals. No doubt he shares his Chief of Staff's opinion regarding the pharisaism and presumption of certain "bosses" of the regime. But he wonders whether Beck has properly measured the risks of the operation. Here the criticisms formulated against Hitler by the former head of the Truppenamt turn back

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. One wonders, in that case, whether Count Helldorf is a very suitable partner.

2. Relations with Beck had become so painful to him that, according to the testimony of his orderly officer, he was seized with trembling before every discussion he had to have with him. (Foerster, op. cit., p. 121.)

[[PDF page 288]]

against him. One is astonished to see a man so meticulous in the elaboration of his military plans show so much lightness — indeed, amateurism — in preparing a coup d'état. How does he think he can associate all the generals with it without giving his action the appearance of a conspiracy? How will the Army face the reckoning that will follow with the S.S. and the Party — a reckoning that will certainly be formidable, for Hitler will react with the utmost violence — on the day after all its leaders have resigned? Finally, the assertion that the coup de force is not directed against Hitler, but only against his entourage, is a myth that it will be impossible to maintain for more than twenty-four hours. How will the soldiers and young officers react on the day when they understand that the High Command has rebelled against "their" Führer? Will they not have the impression that they have been duped, and will they continue to obey the orders of their superiors? If the Luftwaffe and the Kriegsmarine take Hitler's side, does one not risk witnessing a breakup of the Wehrmacht, then a rupture between the Wehrmacht and the rest of the nation, and finally a divorce between the General Staff and the troops? The only beneficiaries will be Germany's enemies. How, under these conditions, can one be surprised that Brauchitsch hesitates at the edge of this Rubicon?

To force the Commander-in-Chief into his last entrenchments, Beck returns to the attack a third time.

"Time is pressing," he tells him on 29 July. "A decision must be made. The situation requires that the Commander-in-Chief, surrounded by the commanders of armies and army groups, go to the Führer to make clear to him that we are in no way ready to launch ourselves into a war against Czechoslovakia. This impossibility has been studied at length by the competent services. It has already been the subject of numerous reports which, until now, have had no effect. To simplify matters, I have drafted the wording of the declaration that should be made

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. "It was discovered that one could not count on the young officers for a political action of this kind," General Thomas will later say. (Gedanken und Ereignisse, Schweizerische Monatshefte, December 1945.)

2. Being "cut off from the nation" is the Army's great obsession. It had suffered too much from it between 1918 and 1925.

[[PDF page 289]]

to the Führer and on which a certain number of generals have already agreed. Here it is:

The Commander-in-Chief and the senior commanders of the Army regret that they cannot assume responsibility for this war without making themselves guilty before their people and before history. They have decided to resign their posts should the Führer persist in his intentions.

“But that is a real ultimatum!” exclaims Brauchitsch.

“The tone of this declaration cannot be too clear or too brutal.”

“And when, according to you, should this step be taken?” asks Brauchitsch.

At that moment, Beck commits a psychological error in which one finds again his temporizing character and his innate taste for “delaying defense.” Instead of sweeping away Brauchitsch’s last scruples by answering “at once,” he explains to him in a calm tone:

“The best thing would be to act at the end of September, when the enthusiasm of the Nuremberg Congress has dissipated.”

Brauchitsch breathes again. He still has two months before him. By then he will have time to make contact with the army commanders, to know what they think, and to make sure that he is not launching himself alone into this hazardous adventure.

“So be it,” replies Beck. “Summon them to conference. You will thus be able to see their state of mind for yourself.”

Against his will, Brauchitsch finally agrees.

The conference takes place in Berlin on 4 August 1938, between the Athletic Festival of Breslau and the Jüterbog maneuvers. All the commanders of armies and army groups have been invited

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Later, members of the opposition will bitterly complain of his inability to make a decision himself. {Kaltenbrunner Berichte, p. 100.}

2. The Nuremberg Congress is to be held from 5 to 12 September 1938.

[[PDF page 290]]

to come to the capital “to proceed to an examination of the political and military situation.” But the discretion they have been advised to observe concerning this meeting, joined to the fact that it is being held at the home of the Chief of the General Staff — and not on the Bendlerstrasse — has made them guess that this is an exceptional circumstance.

Beck himself receives them at the entrance to his house and leads them into the drawing room, where the Commander-in-Chief is already present. About twenty generals take their places in the room. Together, they represent the summit of the German military hierarchy.

The Chief of the General Staff speaks first. He begins by reading them the central part of his

memorandum of 16 July, the part in which he analyzes the balance of forces in the world. His listeners hear him with sustained attention. Beck's stripped-down eloquence and the conviction animating him do not fail to have their effect: the generals are impressed by the dark picture he paints for them of the Army's lack of preparation and of its incapacity to face a generalized war. Brauchitsch then asks General Adam, the head of the Operations Bureau, who has been designated to take command of the western front, to provide information on the state of advancement of the fortified zone.

"The Westwall," he declares, "is at present wholly insufficient, and will remain so for a long time yet. Given the weakness of the forces assigned to this front — 5 active divisions, 4 reserve divisions, and a few Landwehr units — our defense will be quickly pierced. You will tell me that I am painting things in their blackest light. Yet such is the truth."

"I share your apprehensions. The forces assigned to the western front are clearly insufficient," Brauchitsch tells him. "In a few days, when you see the Führer

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. We have, on this meeting, only the single testimony of General Adam, written seven years later in the form of a deposition before the Nuremberg Tribunal. We reproduce it here because we cannot confront it with any other. One is nevertheless entitled to wonder whether Adam did not exaggerate the generals' dejection. "On this whole affair," declares William Shirer, "we possess only the statements of a handful of partisans who, after the war, were anxious to prove their opposition to National Socialism, and what they said and wrote in their own defense is often contradictory and confusing." (Le Troisième Reich, I, p. 447.)

[[PDF page 291]]

to make your report to him, repeat to him exactly what you have just told us."

"I shall have the courage," Adam replies laconically.

Beck rises and goes toward him.

"Adam, I congratulate you," he says to him in an emotional tone, grasping both his hands.

"Gentlemen," Brauchitsch then declares, "you have just heard the point of view of the High Command. Given the gravity of the situation, I consider it indispensable that we speak to one another with open hearts. Let each of you say what he thinks, without any mental reservation."

According to General Adam, most of the generals share Beck's anxieties. But General von Reichenau, who commands the IV Army Group, rebels against the ambient pessimism:

"The question whether or not it is proper to make war does not concern us," he declares. "It is the Führer's affair. We must leave it to him to choose the best solution."

"All the more," adds General Busch, commander of the VIII Army Corps of Breslau, "since nothing can release us from our oath of fidelity. I too know the Army's weak points. But I will nevertheless execute the Führer's orders, for any other attitude would be a breach of discipline."

"Were you not recently at the Breslau Festival?" Beck asks him, visibly irritated by his allusion to the

oath.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. He is one of the only generals who enjoys the Führer's confidence. "Among the soldiers," Hitler said several times, "there is hardly anyone but Reichenau who understands my thought." Fritz Wiedemann adds: "There is nothing astonishing in Hitler's having preferred Reichenau to Beck. The former had ardently taken up the cause of the motorization [of the Army]; the latter, according to Hitler's saying, had never ceased to brake his initiatives. In general, Hitler regarded the General Staff as a backward milieu, both from the political point of view and from that of military technique." [Der Mann der Feldherr werden wollte, p. 252.]

2. General Busch commands at Breslau, in Silesia. When one sees his reaction and remembers that, a few days earlier, Beck had said to Brauchitsch that "the general commanding the troops of Silesia would be perfectly suited to make contact with a few influential members of the Party likely to join the conspiracy" (see above, p. 283), one sees how badly informed he was about the state of mind of the Army Corps commanders.

3. "A corollary of the soldier's 'apolitical' position," Kaltenbrunner wrote to Bormann on 20 August 1944, "is that a fraction of the officer corps does not feel itself bound in any way to the Führer or to the National Socialist Reich. It swore an oath to him simply because it had to, just as it had sworn an oath to the Constitution, to the

[[PDF page 292]]

"Certainly."

"Did you speak there with the Führer?"

"Yes."

"Did you inform him, with complete frankness, of your observations concerning the Army's weak points?"

"No. There were too many witnesses. I judged that the moment was not opportune. I kept to generalities."

Then Beck rises and says to him in a severe tone:

"General, you were formerly a Staff officer. You should know that as such, the duty of a Staff officer is to express his opinion openly, at all times and to anyone, even to the head of state. It is infinitely regrettable that you omitted to do so."

The other generals fall silent, profoundly embarrassed. The harshness of this reprimand seems unjustified to them. Why does Beck speak in this way? Where does he want to go? Instead of raising their morale, he seems to be deliberately discouraging them...

All the generals have the highest esteem for the Chief of the General Staff. But the interventions of Reichenau and Busch have troubled the atmosphere. They have destroyed the unanimity indispensable to the collective step toward which he wished to bring them. Brauchitsch suspected that the generals

would not stand as one behind him, that they would refuse to present their resignation to the Führer. Now he is certain of it. Consequently, he says not a word about it. Beck waits in vain for him to raise the subject. He cannot, after all, force the Commander-in-Chief's hand! But Brauchitsch has renounced it. Does he fear leaks and that Hitler will be prematurely informed? Is he relieved to escape the painful pressure that the Chief of the General Staff has not ceased to exert upon him during the last weeks? Does he believe that this contrivance lacks too much popular foundation to be able to succeed? He limits himself to exchanging

Republic, simply in order to be an officer. No complex is felt at the idea of swearing a new oath if the regime changes and if the whole Wehrmacht rallies to the new state of things. Frau Halder's answer is characteristic: 'My husband fulfilled his soldier's duty under the National Socialist State, just as before... He would do so afterward as well if another regime succeeded it. His bonds of allegiance toward Hitler are no deeper than toward Ebert. One marches against the man who is designated to us as the enemy.'" {Spiegelbild einer Verschwörung, p. 273.}

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Russian historians have insisted at length on the reactionary character of the generals' opposition and on its absolute lack of popular foundations.

[[PDF page 293]]

a few amiable words with the generals present, thanks them for coming, and closes the session.

"On leaving," General Adam will later declare, "none of us was freed from the weight that oppressed him."

Brauchitsch has not spoken of the collective resignation, and Beck has not wished to reveal anything of his plan for a coup d'état. Everything has remained at the stage of intention. Thus one should not be surprised if, at the end of this day, the Chief of the General Staff feels himself invaded by a feeling of sadness. He has fought to the extreme limit of his strength to impose his point of view. But the Commander-in-Chief has not wished to throw his authority into the balance. As a result, all his projects have vanished in smoke.

Yet he still keeps a glimmer of hope. At the Jüterbog maneuvers, where he is to go in eleven days, Brauchitsch and most of the generals will be assembled around Hitler. Since the affair is strictly military, there will be no embarrassing witnesses. Perhaps at that moment they will decide to speak?

Beck has not seen Hitler again since the day when the Führer summoned him to the Chancellery to put the final touches to the plans for the invasion of Austria. The memory of the rebuke Hitler threw at him on that occasion still burns:

"I have already told you and repeated to you that your fears are unjustified!" he declared to him in a biting tone. "There is no reason to fear foreign intervention. Neither England, nor France, nor Czechoslovakia will move. Please therefore spare yourself superfluous comments and confine yourself to executing my orders!"

Until now, Beck has known the Führer's intentions only through the reports of Schmundt and Keitel. Perhaps they have misinterpreted his thought? But when he hears the following words fall from Hitler's own mouth: "Gentlemen, the decisive hour is approaching. I have decided to crush

(Cf. Otto Winzer, Zwölf Jahre Kampf gegen Fascismus in Frieden und Krieg, Berlin, 1955; Walter Bartel, Deutschland in der Zeit der faschistischen Diktatur, 1933–1945, Berlin, 1955; D. Melnikov: La Conjuration du 20 juillet 1944. Légende et Réalité, 1962; Wilhelm Ersil, Die Verfälschung des Charakters der Verschwörung vom 20sten Juli 1944 durch die westdeutsche Geschichtsschreibung.)

[[PDF page 294]]

Czechoslovakia by force of arms, and that as soon as this autumn," he hopes that the generals will take advantage of it to present him with their resignation. When he sees some approve him and others remain silent, he tells himself bitterly that they have let pass the last chance to avoid war. Since they have not protested this time, they will never protest. Beck knows at that moment that he has lost the game.

He has nothing left but to give his resignation. When General von Manstein tries to dissuade him from it, he replies: "It is too late."

On 18 August, he sends the Führer a letter in which he asks to be relieved of his duties. Hitler, who is not unaware of the role Beck has played during these last weeks, accepts eagerly. But since he does not want foreign countries to guess the extent of their disagreement at the moment when the crisis is entering its culminating phase, he has Brauchitsch ask him not to make his resignation official until a later date, invoking "reasons of foreign policy." Beck having agreed to this, Hitler entrusts him with command of the 1st Army at Wiesbaden and designates General Halder to succeed him. General Adam is dismissed as well, because of the solidarity of opinion with General Beck which he expressed to Hitler during an inspection of the western fortifications.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Manstein, who now commands the 18th Division at Liegnitz, had formerly been Quartermaster-General. Informed of Beck's discouragement, he wrote to him on 21 July: "Remain at your post. None of your successors would enjoy the same prestige or the same authority as you. The Army has no one who has your competence and your strength of character, nor anyone capable of mastering as you can the difficult tasks that await us. You will not take it amiss that I tell you this with complete frankness, for you feel well, General, that these words are not dictated to me by banal politeness, but by a profound conviction." (Cf. Foerster, Generaloberst Ludwig Beck, p. 143.)

2. "Beck's activities had been known for a long time," writes Kaltenbrunner, "and he would long since have been imprisoned if he had been a civilian."

3. Hitler has every interest in settling the affair without provoking upheaval. But that he succeeded so easily shows how little Beck was followed. (It even seems that a certain number of generals welcomed his departure with relief.) The public will know the news only on 31 October, that is, one month after the Munich Conference. At that moment, the former Chief of the General Staff will definitively leave the Army and Hitler will raise him to the rank of colonel-general, which will enable him to pin three gold stars on the uniform he will no longer wear.

[[PDF page 295]]

On the morning of 27 August, Beck hands over his powers to the new Chief of the General Staff and takes leave of his close collaborators, of the Quartermasters-General, and of his bureau chiefs.

“When we entered his office,” writes General Hossbach, “Beck was standing near a window, motionless, his hands joined, without returning the salute of those who passed before him. His gaze was fixed on a distant horizon, and his handsome face, imbued with spirituality but made pale by insomnia, had an almost timeless expression. He delivered to us a short speech of about a quarter of an hour, classical in form and full of wisdom in substance. Its purpose was to make us understand the efforts he had made to safeguard the autonomy of the Great General Staff, a task which circumstances had unfortunately not allowed him to accomplish as much as he would have wished.

“Beck had begun his speech by informing us that he was leaving us. He ended it by thanking us for the help we had given him. I remain convinced that, among his listeners, even the small number of those who believed that his departure had become inevitable were impressed by the nobility and dignity emanating from this man, the last Chief of the General Staff worthy of the name that Germany has had.”

[[PDF page 296]]

XIV

THE DIPLOMATIC IMPASSE

I. — France becomes aware of its impotence.

While these scenes are unfolding in Prague and Berlin, what is happening in the other European capitals? Are they preparing for war? Does France have sufficient forces to overwhelm the Wehrmacht by massive attacks and to drive through the western fortified zone in a few days? Finally, are France and England fully determined to resort to arms should the Reich attack Czechoslovakia?

The declarations of certain politicians would tend to make one believe so. Yet if one removes this verbal screen and looks into the deeper zones where the real political decisions are made, one realizes that reality is very different. The military problems confronting France are of great complexity. At the moment when affairs grow serious, the French Government discovers with alarm the incompatibility that exists between the means at its disposal and the obligations it has contracted.

On 15 March 1938, the Permanent Committee of National Defense meets in Paris, at the Hôtel Matignon, under the presidency of Édouard Daladier, to study the aid to be brought to Czechoslovakia, at the same time as the possibilities of intervention in Spain. Despite the dryness customary in documents of this kind, the minutes of the meeting make

[[PDF page 297]]

clearly apparent the tragic absurdity of the situation.

Léon Blum, President of the Council, opens the session at 6:15 p.m. by giving the floor to Paul-Boncour.

M. Paul-Boncour, Minister of Foreign Affairs. — “In diplomatic conversations with Great Britain, we have been trying for several days to obtain from the English a declaration concerning their attitude in the Czechoslovak problem. To these urgings, the English reply: ‘You tell us that you will go to the aid

of Czechoslovakia, but practically, what will you do?'

"That is the question I put today to the qualified military organ: the Permanent Committee of National Defense."

M. Daladier, Minister of War. — "France cannot initially bring any direct aid to Czechoslovakia. The only aid she can bring is indirect: to hold German troops on her frontiers by mobilizing. The problem that arises is to know whether, under these conditions, Germany would have enough forces left to attempt action against Czechoslovakia."

General Gamelin, Chief of Staff of National Defense. — "France could reinforce this fixing action by attacking. But since these attacks would apply to an already fortified zone, they would lead us to operations of long duration...

"I do not see what effective aid Russia could initially bring. Would not its mobilization, on the contrary, risk turning Poland and Romania away from entering into action? The transport of the Russian army by the single

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Present are: M. Léon Blum, President of the Council; M. Daladier, Minister of National Defense and War, president of the Committee; M. Paul-Boncour, Minister of Foreign Affairs; M. Campinchi, Minister of the Navy; M. Guy La Chambre, Minister of Air; Marshal Pétain, Minister of State; General Gamelin, Chief of the General Staff of National Defense; M. Alexis Léger, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Controller-General Jacomet, Secretary-General of the Ministry of National Defense and War; General Colson, Chief of Staff of the Army; Vice-Admiral Darlan, Chief of the General Staff of the Navy; Rear-Admiral Tavera, director of the Cabinet of the Minister of the Navy; General Vuillemin, Chief of the General Staff of the Air Force; General Jamet, Secretary-General of the Superior Council of National Defense; Lieutenant-Colonel Lacaille, of the Secretariat-General of the Superior Council of National Defense.

2. As may be seen, General Gamelin avoids answering the question. In 1946, he would specify that in his opinion, the French Army was incapable of executing a decisive attack before 1941–1942. {Servir, III, p. 33.}

[[PDF page 298]]

bad Romanian railway line is not to be envisaged. The only possible land assistance seems to consist in the dispatch of motorized troops. Even that support is very uncertain, owing to the condition of the roads at this time of year. In any case, the effectiveness of Russian aid is conditioned by the attitude of Poland and Romania."

M. Daladier. — "And from the air point of view?"

General Vuillemin, Chief of the General Staff of the Air Force. — "From the air point of view, Russian intervention on behalf of Czechoslovakia is very difficult. First of all, it would be necessary to fly over Poland and Romania, which implies that they have taken a position. Moreover, there exist in Czechoslovakia very few airfields: about forty, which German aviation would very quickly render unusable."

M. Léon Blum. — “In sum, if I summarize the statements just made, we can fix German forces by means of our mobilization and offensive operations, but we cannot prevent action against Czechoslovakia. We therefore have here a concrete way of showing the English the necessity for them to act in Bucharest and Brussels.”

General Gamelin. — “As regards Brussels, one can envisage the solution of a maneuver through Belgium. But it could have its full force only if our troops were not held, as must be expected, in the Alps and in North Africa.”

M. Léon Blum. — “How could we intervene

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. According to M. Comnène, Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, twenty days would be needed to move a single Soviet division across Czechoslovakia on the single-track line linking the two countries. In the interval, this line could be destroyed by German aviation. According to M. Kennan, former United States ambassador in Moscow, the passage time would have been still longer: three months. (Cf. Alfred Fabre-Luce, L’Enjeu de la diplomatie, de Munich à nos jours, Revue des Deux Mondes, 1 March 1963, p. 28.) At one moment, the construction of a second strategic railway line leading from Czernowitz to Prague, through Ruthenia and Slovakia, was considered. But this project was abandoned for multiple reasons: very high construction costs, given the mountainous nature of the terrain; a considerable number of tunnels and engineering works, offering easy targets to sabotage teams and German aviation; too great a proximity to the southern frontiers of Ruthenia and Slovakia, which would have exposed the line to flank attacks from Hungary.

2. This is why General Vuillemin had already said “that in case of conflict with Germany, Czech aviation could be of no assistance to France.”

3. In sum, Paris confines itself to sending the ball back to London. To Downing Street, which asks: “What can you do practically?” the Quai d’Orsay replies: “You yourselves should exert pressure on Romania and Belgium.”

[[PDF page 299]]

in Spain and support an ultimatum of this kind to General Franco: If, within twenty-four hours, you have not renounced the support of foreign forces, France resumes her freedom of action and reserves the right to take herself all measures of intervention she judges useful. This would be a maneuver of the same order as the one Chancellor Hitler has just attempted and succeeded in Austria.”

General Gamelin. — “The conditions are not the same. We have only an active army of 400,000 men in France, whereas the Germans have 900,000 men. If we wanted to play such a game, we would have to have one million men, that is, covering forces...”

M. Campinchi, Minister of the Navy. — “Given the weakness of our aviation, what would be the consequence, on the conduct of the war, of total mastery of the air by Germany?”

General Vuillemin. — “Our aviation would be annihilated in a fortnight.”

Marshal Pétain. — “In aviation, it is less the initial forces than the construction potential that counts. Now this potential, we do not have.”

M. Guy La Chambre, Minister of Air. — “The present rate of our production is 40 aircraft per month. It will soon be 60.”

Marshal Pétain. — “That is little, compared with the production of our principal possible adversary, which a modest estimate puts at 250 per month.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. That very morning, Gabriel Péri had written in L’Humanité: “Mr. President of the Council, Mr. Minister of Foreign Affairs... today you can save everything or sacrifice what remains of French security. It depends on the resolution you take in a few hours. To speak plainly, it depends on your ability to save French security in Spain in a few hours by using the means necessary.” Blum, who lives in dread of a Franco victory, is extremely sensitive to arguments of this kind. Moreover, he fears discouraging Russia by not fully supporting the Spanish revolutionaries. Finally, he fears being “dropped” by the Communist deputies in the Palais-Bourbon if he does not satisfy the demands of the Barcelona Committee, which might bring about the fall of his ministry.

2. That is, the “Condor Legion,” furnished by Germany (about 10,000 men), two Italian divisions (one regular, one of Fascist militias, in all

3. Blum’s reasoning is not very clear, since Hitler had never addressed an ultimatum to Schuschnigg summoning him to renounce the support of foreign troops.

4. Exact figure: 550. At the Riom trial, Guy La Chambre will declare: “At the

[[PDF page 300]]

M. Paul-Boncour. — “What would be the consequences of a total success by General Franco and of his collusion with Germany and Italy?”

General Gamelin then reads a note he has prepared in order to answer this question:

A definitive success by General Franco in Spain, combined with the consequences of his military agreement with the Italy-Germany group, would present for France, in the event of a conflict with these Powers, maritime, air, and land consequences, the first being of capital importance.

I. — Maritime consequences.

— The contribution brought to our enemies by the Spanish fleet would be quite negligible.

— On the other hand, one would have to reckon with the naval bases that the enemy navies would have at their disposal (El Ferrol, Vigo, Cadiz, Ceuta, Cartagena, the Balearics, Villa-Cisneros, the Canary Islands, Fernando Po, and Guinea). These would constitute bases of action for naval or air forces, whose objective would be the destruction of our trade, as well as the attack on our troop transports or transports of national interest.

This threat would be particularly dangerous for our maritime communications in the Mediterranean, both with North Africa and with the Levant; it would also affect our Atlantic communications (Morocco and America) and our imperial links bound for the Overseas Territories, in particular French

West Africa and French Equatorial Africa.

II. — Air consequences.

Air forces based on Spanish territory would have the possibility of undertaking powerful expeditions at good range:

a) Against Bordeaux, the whole Garonne basin, and particularly Toulouse;

b) Against all the populated and sensitive part of North Africa;

c) Against all our air and naval bases in the western Mediterranean basin;

d) Against our maritime lines of communication in the western Mediterranean and eastern Atlantic.

beginning of 1938, France was five years behind as regards the aeronautical industries." (Paul Soupirou, Le Procès de Riom, p. 314.)

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. "The constant threat weighing on our maritime communications in the Mediterranean and even in the Atlantic," this note also says, "would transform each passage into a real forced operation... The regularity of traffic on the imperial routes would also be directly related to the importance of the protective means

[[PDF page 301]]

III. — Land consequences.

— Possibilities for our enemies to threaten the Pyrenean frontier, on which we would have to immobilize defensive elements to face Italo-German troops reinforcing Spanish forces.

— Creation of a theater of operations in Spanish Morocco.

— Possibility of operations in Mauritania (Rio de Oro) and in Guinea.

A deep silence follows the reading of this note. It is certain that it opens, for those who have listened to it, perspectives whose scale and gravity they had not suspected...

After a moment, M. Léger takes the floor.

"One cannot compromise with this eventuality. England will separate from us if we abandon non-intervention without a new element."

M. Léon Blum. — "Without intervening militarily, could we not intensify the aid furnished to Spain?"

General Gamelin. — "This measure would have the consequence of disarming the French forces and would have an uncertain result, the government forces being quite unsuited to maneuver."

capable of being assigned to it, and the considerable diversions imposed would increase the rotation

time of our supply transports." A phenomenon of the same order would occur for British communications. (Gamelin, Servir, II, p. 330.)

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. "No doubt there will be critical minds," Gamelin remarks in his Memoirs, "to say that the military saw difficulties everywhere and that it was they who prevented the Government from acting. But the role of technicians is to show statesmen exactly the difficulties to be overcome, for only the latter can provide the means of resolving them. If they did not do so, these technicians would fail in their duty. And in matters so grave, it would be unforgivable to decide lightly. War in itself contains enough uncertainties without adding lack of foresight and illusions." (Gamelin, Servir, II, pp. 329–331.)

3. At this moment, England has just begun talks with Italy that will lead to the agreement of 16 April. The conversations under way concern the strengthening of non-intervention in Spain and the withdrawal of Italian troops in exchange for England's recognition of the Italian Empire of Ethiopia.

4. That is, the delivery of arms to government troops and to the International Brigades.

6. The Spanish Republicans have just suffered defeat after defeat. Their government, refugee in Barcelona since October 1937, is literally at bay. Spain is cut in two and Prieto, on the eve of being overthrown, cried out: "A world war is needed to save the Republic!"

[[PDF page 302]]

A confused discussion follows concerning the diplomatic means capable of separating Franco from Germany and Italy. M. Paul-Boncour observes that even if this evolution takes place, it will take a great deal of time, and that the problems confronting France are too urgent to allow it to wait until then.

"As regards Poland," he continues, "as long as Colonel Beck is Minister of Foreign Affairs, not only does Czechoslovakia have no help to expect from it, but one must fear that Poland will try to profit from German action against that Power."

M. Daladier then asks: "What would be the reaction of Germany and Italy if we intervened in Spain?"

M. Léon Blum. — "Would it be a casus belli for them?"

M. Léger. — "Without any doubt."

M. Paul-Boncour. — "Contrary to what one might have thought, the understanding between Germany and Italy has never been closer."

M. Daladier. — "In sum, an intervention not motivated by new facts would risk leaving us alone facing Germany and Italy, with the mediocre assistance of a distant and weakened Russia, and without being at all assured of the support of Great Britain."

M. Léon Blum, President of the Council, closes the session at 8 p.m. Neither he nor Paul-Boncour is very much at ease, they who the day before yesterday had summoned M. Osorio y Gallardo, ambassador of Spain, to promise him that they would intervene in favor of the Republican Government, and M. Stefan Osusky, minister of Czechoslovakia in Paris, to assure him that France would faithfully respect its commitments toward his country...

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Minutes of the session of the National Defense Committee, 15 March 1938. This text remained unknown to the public until December 1946, the date on which General Gamelin reproduced it in his Memoirs. {Servir, II, pp. 322–331.}

3. In order not to break his word, Blum, overriding General Gamelin's warnings, will sign on 17 March a secret decree (not published in the Journal officiel and transmitted confidentially to the directors of customs concerned), authorizing the passage of war material and munitions at the Catalan frontier. The volume of shipments will amount to 25,000 tons in the following weeks, which will allow the Spanish Reds to prolong their resistance by one year.

[[PDF page 303]]

Thus France finds herself placed before these anguishing prospects: risks of considerable extension of the theaters of operations if she intervenes in Spain; reduced possibilities of action if she intervenes against Germany. These possibilities will shrink further in the coming weeks. On 22 May, General Gamelin, who has left for an inspection in Brittany, is abruptly recalled to Paris by a telephone call from his Staff. A rumor is circulating that Germany has mobilized. Beneš has recalled five classes of reservists. At any moment the Reich is expected to attack Czechoslovakia.

Daladier, who succeeded Léon Blum as President of the Council on 10 April, receives the Chief of the General Staff in his office on the rue Saint-Dominique. M. Georges Bonnet, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, attends the conversation.

"The situation is grave," says Daladier. "We have come within two fingers of war. It has been avoided thanks to England's attitude. But England complains of the Czechoslovaks, who lack flexibility. Von Ribbentrop said to the British ambassador: 'We want an independent status for the Germans of Czechoslovakia. If the Czechs do not want it, we shall ensure this independence ourselves. If France opposes it, let her attack us!' The general situation is moreover mediocre. Poland wants to know nothing: she will occupy Teschen and

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. The Blum Cabinet was overthrown before the Senate on 8 April. President Lebrun then called on Daladier, whose Government was constituted as follows: Presidency of the Council, National Defense, and War: Édouard Daladier; Vice-Presidency of the Council: Camille Chautemps; Foreign Affairs: Georges Bonnet; Justice: Paul Reynaud; Interior: Albert Sarraut; Navy: César Campinchi; Air: Guy La Chambre; Finance: Paul Marchandeau; Public Works: L.-O. Frossard; Agriculture: Henri Queuille; National Education: Jean Zay; Labor: Paul Ramadier; Colonies: Georges Mandel; Public Health: Marc Rucart; Veterans: Champetier de Ribes; Merchant Marine: L. de Chappedelaine; National Economy: Raymond Patenôtre.

3. It is known that the news of the German mobilization, launched from Prague, was false. (See above, p. 228.)

4. During the days of 21 and 22 May, the British ambassador went twice to the Wilhelmstrasse to warn Ribbentrop against the danger of a coup de force. Ribbentrop flew to report it to Hitler, but the English reaction went no further.

[[PDF page 304]]

will oppose the passage of the Russians. Romania has a better attitude. But a very bad sound is coming from Belgium. The Minister of Foreign Affairs told our ambassador, M. Bargeton: 'We have just held maneuvers on the French frontier to show that, if you enter our territory to support the Czechs, you will meet the Belgian army.' What can you do in this situation?"

"I shall attack!" replies Gamelin. "But before me I have fortifications, and, no doubt, I shall quickly have the bulk of the German Army if Poland does not intervene, unless Russia enters the game. It may therefore be a long-drawn-out battle. The fate of Czechoslovakia risks being settled before we have obtained, on our side, a decision."

"All the same, France's position must be maintained," declares Daladier. "She is bound to Czechoslovakia and obliged to intervene."

"No doubt," adds Georges Bonnet, "but Czechoslovakia must not show excessive intransigence in the question of the Sudeten populations."

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. On France's commitments, see above, p. 202 note 3. Georges Bonnet writes on this subject: "France was bound to Czechoslovakia by the Locarno Agreements... Briand himself had defined and limited their scope. If Czechoslovakia were the object, on Germany's part, of an unprovoked aggression, France was to bring it aid and assistance whose modalities had never been defined; we were bound by no military agreement. And the Quai d'Orsay considered (?) that to fulfill our commitments it was enough for us to mobilize a few classes in order to retain on our frontiers a part of the German troops." (Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 191.) Celovsky does not share this way of seeing. He emphasizes the Assistance Pact of 1924, which had never been denounced and was accompanied by military provisions.

2. Until now, the French knew nothing of the Sudetens, whom they believed to be an invention of Hitlerian propaganda. Bonnet had better information thanks to Anatole de Monzie. "I demand in vain from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," the latter writes, "the text of the memorandum deposited at the Peace Conference by the Austrian Chancellor Renner on the attachment of the Sudetens to Czechoslovakia. [Reproduced above, p. 149.] Georges Bonnet, to whom I speak of this document, declares that he does not have it in his file — the file constituted by the bureaux. It occurs to me that I will find it at the Bibliothèque Nationale and it is thus that, indeed, I can reread the solemn warnings given on 15 June 1919 by the Social Democrat Renner to the monopolizers of Central Europe: 'The Allied Powers are in the process... of dragging Czechoslovakia into an adventurous and catastrophic policy... The Powers would create in the center of Europe a focus of civil war whose blaze could become, for the world, far more dangerous than was the continual fermentation in the Balkans.' Attached to the memorandum is a reasoned and prophetic protest, drawn up and presented by the representatives of the German lands of the Sudetens. Nevertheless, nineteen years later, the Sudeten revolt is accused of being a rigged demonstration by suspect elements!

[[PDF page 305]]

"Nor must Czechoslovakia," Gamelin agrees, "disappear from the map of Central Europe. Germany would then have her hands free either against Poland or against us."

Meanwhile, the weeks pass, tension increases, and France still cannot take a position. Opinion grows nervous and divides into two camps. Some are for war. Others for conciliation. These contrary tendencies appear in the press, in Parliament, and even within the Cabinet.

Some time later, Gamelin having let it be understood that the German fortifications considerably reduced his offensive possibilities and that Czech resistance would be short, this news provokes indignation in certain parliamentary circles. Alexis Léger comes to see the generalissimo and says to him:

“There must be no possibility of doubting your intentions. It is being repeated in government circles that you have no other solution than to attack through Lorraine...”

“And by where do they want us to attack, if we cannot pass through Belgium?” replies Gamelin, irritated. “Force the Rhine, also fortified, to go and run into the Black Forest?”

One must!... One must not!... These injunctions express the disarray of political circles. But whatever the desires of one or another, the military situation remains dominated by a certain number of factors, which appear more and more clearly as the days pass. Gamelin summarizes them in the following way, in a note intended for the head of the Government:

Our ignorance and our thoughtlessness are patent. I hand the recovered texts to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, whom his services have once again tried to mislead.” {Ci-devant, p. 18.}

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Within the Cabinet, the partisans of conciliation are: Georges Bonnet, Chautemps, Marchandeau, Frossard, and Queuille; opposed to it are: Paul Reynaud, Mandel, Campinchi, Jean Zay, Champetier de Ribes, and de Chappedelaine.

3. At least the rumor of it was brought back from London by Sir Eric Phipps, British ambassador in Paris. Gamelin will vigorously protest against the remarks attributed to him. But this opinion conforms to his other declarations.

[[PDF page 306]]

I. — Nothing to be done on the Rhine, doubled by the Black Forest. We would have space and immediately interesting objectives only through Belgium. But Belgium will not let us pass, and we will not penetrate its territory without its consent. There remains therefore only the sector between the Rhine and the Moselle. Because of the narrowness of the terrain between the Haardt and the Rhine, the favorable zone is limited by the Haardt, the Hochwald, and the Saar mining basin.

The corridor between the Saar massif and the Hochwald requires forcing the Saar. It is therefore a frontal struggle between the bulk of the French and German forces.

A rapid calculation shows that the most favorable hypothesis for us is that of initial equality of forces: 50 to 60 infantry divisions on each side.

Recalling the experience of the war, can there be a rapid decision if we attack the Germans installed on the defensive, with the fortifications?

Finally, what will happen when the Germans can recover part of their forces engaged against Czechoslovakia?

To find out, Gamelin has addressed himself to Generals Georges and Billotte. Here is their answer:

One must retain from the balance sheet of the forces present that Germany has the possibility, while attacking Czechoslovakia and covering herself facing France, of having forces appreciably equal to ours, that is, about fifty divisions of various kinds. These forces will rest on a fortified system of value, reinforced for a month and a half. Therefore, no rapid decision can be foreseen on this side.

After the crushing of Czechoslovakia, Germany will be able to dispose of possible reinforcements, owing to the formation of new units evaluated at 15 infantry divisions per month after the thirtieth day. It has men and material for this purpose, if not cadres. But such units, of mediocre value, could free, on passive fronts, battle divisions.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. This concerns the equality of land forces, Gamelin — like Beck — attaching only secondary importance to aviation and tanks.

2. Of 1914. The French High Command — with a few rare exceptions — remains dominated by the memories of the First World War.

3. Gamelin does not know that Hitler has provided, for the western front, only 5 active divisions and 4 reserve divisions. (See above, p. 286.)

5. General Georges too overestimates the volume of German forces assigned to the defense of the western front.

[[PDF page 307]]

After how many days following its mobilization would France be in a position to take the offensive? Eight to ten days, if it is executed with the covering reserves; twenty days, if it is executed with the reinforced covering force.

Thus it is in the narrow corridor stretching between the Hochwald and the Saar plateau that the bulk of the French forces will have to confront the German forces. It will be equal to them (the most favorable hypothesis) for only about a fortnight, after which the German effectives will increase by all the divisions freed by the crushing of Bohemia. A hard trial in prospect for the French combatants...

Because of this, the situation undergoes a paradoxical reversal: even before entering the war to assist Czechoslovakia, the French Army asks the Czech Army to make its task easier by holding the bulk of the German forces as long as possible on the Czechoslovak front. For this, Gamelin suggests to General Syrový that he prolong the duration of his resistance as much as possible by sacrificing Bohemia and withdrawing eastward, toward the mountains of Moravia, where he can finally be taken in by the Russians.

One can easily imagine General Syrový’s feelings upon receiving this “advice,” whose effect would be to make the airfields, the fortifications, the principal cities, the railway communication nodes, perhaps even the capital, fall into German hands on the first day of the war. Yet, after a terrible debate of

conscience, he accepts this sacrifice. Since he cannot do otherwise, he will abandon the country in the hope of recovering it later,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. On this delay (fifteen to twenty days), Gamelin and Georges are in agreement. The lapse of time separating mobilization from the offensive is due to the necessity of grouping a very numerous mobile artillery, in order to outclass the firepower of the “Westwall” fortifications.

3. We have already met General Syrový during the retreat of the Czech Legions across Siberia. (See above, p. 53.) Returned to Prague, Syrový remained in the Czech Army, where he exercised various commands before becoming Chief of the General Staff (until 1933), then Inspector-General of the Army (from 1934 to 1938).

4. Message from General Gamelin to General Syrový, Servir, II, pp. 355–356. “Harsh advice,” writes Gamelin, “whose cruelty we felt very well.”

5. To tell the truth, the Czech General Staff had already envisaged this possibility, but only as a hypothesis. It hoped until the last moment that a rapid decision on the western front would dispense it from putting it into execution.

[[PDF page 308]]

and informs the French General Staff of the decision he has taken.

“Our situation would no doubt be much more advantageous,” concludes General Gamelin, “if Poland seriously engaged the German forces, if Russia attacked Poland (should the latter make common cause with Germany), or if Italy changed camp.”

But who can affirm that these hopes will be realized? This is to say how dependent France’s action is on the support she will find in London, Washington, and Moscow...

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. “The plan of the Czechoslovak General Staff, which was given to us on 21 September,” writes Georges Bonnet, “consisted in retreating into the mountains to put up a resistance there which, in the unanimous opinion and despite this withdrawal, could only be of short duration.” {Le Quai d’Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 208.}

2. In that case, France would also be obliged to declare war on Russia, since the Franco-Polish assistance pacts of 1921 and 1925 guarantee Poland both against aggression from Germany and against aggression from the U.S.S.R. (See above, pp. 201–202.)

[[PDF page 309]]

XV

THE DIPLOMATIC IMPASSE

II. — England refuses to commit itself on the continent.

“With Franco in the process of winning the war thanks to the help of German guns and Italian aircraft,” Neville Chamberlain writes to his sister on 20 March 1938; “with a French Government in which one cannot have the least confidence and which I suspect of being in league with our opposition; with the Russians slyly pulling all the strings to precipitate us into a war with Germany (our Secret Services do not spend all their time watching flies); and finally, with a Germany intoxicated by triumphs and supremely conscious of her strength, one can say indeed that the prospects are rather gloomy. In the face of such problems, to be constantly harried and pressed to choose a clear, clean, bold line and to show ‘true courage,’ all this chatter can only irritate a man who will have to assume responsibility for the consequences. In fact, the project of a ‘Grand Alliance,’ as Churchill calls it, had come to my mind long before he spoke of it... I opened my mind about it to Halifax, and we submitted it to the Chiefs of Staff and to the experts of the Foreign Office. It is a very seductive idea. One would even be tempted to say that there is nothing to object to it, until the moment when one examines its possibilities of realization. From that moment, its seduction vanishes. It is enough to throw a glance at the map to realize that nothing that we could do, neither France nor we, could prevent Czechoslovakia from being submerged by the Germans. The Austrian frontier is practically open. The great Skoda armament factories are within a short distance of German airfields; all the railway lines pass through Reich territory;

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Churchill believes that England must immediately conclude an offensive and defensive “Grand Alliance” with France and Russia, and go boldly forward.

Russia is a hundred leagues away. It is therefore impossible to help Czechoslovakia. Wanting to support that country would only be a pretext for declaring war on Germany. There can be no question of that unless there is a reasonable chance of bringing her rapidly to her knees, and of that I see no indication. I have therefore abandoned the idea of giving guarantees to Czechoslovakia, or even to France, to enable her to fulfill the obligations she has contracted toward that country.”

In writing these lines, Chamberlain is sure of being in agreement with the majority of his compatriots. The English, indeed, have a very different view of Czechoslovakia from that of the French. This country is not, in any degree, a factor of their power. It interests them much less than Suez, Malta, or Gibraltar. Unlike France and the U.S.S.R., the Government of London has always refused to undertake the slightest commitment toward it. Moreover, most Englishmen pass severe judgment on the Government of Prague, devoid of all sentimentality.

From the peace negotiations of 1919 onward, the British delegation was shocked by the artificial character of the new State. Lloyd George fought so that certain territories populated by Germans, especially the projections of Asch and Eger, would be attached to the Reich and not handed over to Czechoslovakia. He ran up against the opposition of Beneš and Clemenceau. Since then, the English have closely followed the country’s evolution. They have seen the Czechoslovak State — which its founders had promised to model on Switzerland — transform itself into a centralized State, then into a police State, and strive to repress by force all the conflicts that arise inevitably from the clash of two antagonistic communities imposed upon one another to live together. They have seen the economic recession fall upon the German districts, causing unemployment there much greater than in the Czech districts, because of their more advanced industrialization. They have observed that the Czech Government had had to postpone elections for five or six years, for fear of the grave disturbances that might result.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. At the time of the Treaty of Locarno, Briand tried to obtain England's extension of its guarantee to the eastern frontiers of the Reich (Poland and Czechoslovakia). England categorically refused. It never wished to commit itself beyond the French frontiers and the Rhine.

[[PDF page 311]]

They have seen the police resort to extreme means — shootings, beatings, and mass arrests — to prevent the opposition from expressing itself freely. They have told themselves — well before Hitler's advent — that if this state of things were not remedied, Europe would move toward a new Thirty Years' War. This opinion has been reinforced by the lectures in which Henlein has painted for them the distress of the German populations in its most dramatic light, and by the fact that the Czech Government has never made the slightest gesture to conciliate its neighbors. Horthy, the Regent of Hungary, cannot endure them. The Poles, whose eyes are fixed on the coalfields of Teschen, declare that "they are not gentlemen." Lord Rothermere has conducted in the Daily Mail a very violent press campaign, in which he has asserted, among other things, that "Czechoslovakia was an odious country, the Czechs scoundrels, and that not one Englishman would have endured without revolt the living conditions imposed on the Sudetens for nearly twenty years."

"These accusations are perhaps exaggerated," the average Englishman has told himself; "but one must believe that the situation is painful, for the Slovaks themselves no longer to want to endure it. None of this would have happened if the negotiators of the peace treaties had not violated the right of peoples to dispose of themselves, that principle which the Allies had placed at the head of their war aims!"

After having lavished warnings on the Prague Government for six years, the Foreign Office has grown weary. At the end of 1937, it pressed Beneš to make serious concessions to the Sudetens and obtained from the Quai d'Orsay that it associate itself with this step. But the Czech authorities turned a deaf ear, without realizing that they were living on a volcano. Now the great majority of the Sudetens is on the eve of insurrection and Henlein's young activists, massed along the roads in black shorts and white stockings, are impatiently awaiting the arrival

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The Prague Government disputes the reality of the facts. But the photographic reports are unfortunately eloquent. One sees only lines of unemployed before soup kitchens, women in rags, and houses ransacked.

[[PDF page 312]]

of the German armies, whose motorized divisions, setting out from Vienna and Breslau, could seize Czechoslovakia by the throat and cut its jugular artery in one afternoon.

Faced with this situation, what can England do? Take no interest in the question? That would mean renouncing its role as a great Power. Declare war on Germany? Not only is England disarmed on land and in the air, but the countries of the Commonwealth would not understand its putting its existence in peril to ensure the survival of Czechoslovakia. Moreover, Hitler has recently raised, with particular insistence, the problem of the restitution to the Reich of its former colonies. "I am not in a hurry," he had Lord Halifax told, "I can still wait a few years. But the question will end by arising sooner or later, if Germany finds no other outlet for the excess of its population." Now this demand seems far more

formidable to English opinion than German ambitions in Central Europe. By giving satisfactions to Hitler on the European continent, England hopes to turn him away from his aims in Africa and Oceania.

For all these reasons, Chamberlain chose, as early as 1937, the following policy: intensify pressure on Prague to induce Beneš to settle the Sudeten problem by direct negotiation; dissuade Hitler from resorting to force; make France understand that England will not follow her if she encourages Czech intransigence by the promise of armed intervention. Once this line of conduct has been defined, Chamberlain will hold to it with

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain, p. 346.

2. It is enough to read the correspondence of Mackenzie King, Canadian Prime Minister, congratulating Chamberlain “on his efforts to come closer to Italy and Germany,” to realize that this is not a gratuitous assertion.

3. Given how little importance Hitler attached to colonies (see vol. IV, p. 282), it is permissible to think that his colonial demands had no other purpose than to alarm England and make it more “malleable” with regard to his policy of expansion in the east.

4. Since his journey to London in March 1936, during the remilitarization of the left bank of the Rhine (see vol. III, p. 293 ff.), Pierre-Étienne Flandin had acquired the conviction that England would not follow France in its policy of support for the countries of Central Europe. He concluded that France had to fall back on herself and on her Empire and disengage herself from the obligations she had contracted beyond the Rhine.

[[PDF page 313]]

inflexible tenacity, convinced that by acting thus he is defending at once British interests, morality, and peace.

Throughout his ministry, Léon Blum strove to bring the English Government back from its position. On 15 March 1938, he pressed it to declare publicly that it would be at France’s side if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia.

The answer from London was not long in coming:

Foreign Office, 22 March 1938.

Viscount Halifax to Sir Eric Phipps, Paris.

... Recently, and on many occasions, the French Government has publicly reaffirmed the obligations it has contracted toward Czechoslovakia and has assured that they would be fulfilled if the need made itself felt.

The obligations contracted toward France by His Majesty’s Government — apart from those binding them to one another as members of the League of Nations — are limited to those inscribed in the Treaty of Locarno. These obligations subsist, in accordance with the arrangement concluded in London

on 19 March 1936, and will be scrupulously respected should France be the victim of unprovoked aggression by Germany.

Such are the obligations assumed by His Majesty's Government... They are not a negligible contribution to the maintenance of peace in Europe. But His Majesty's Government does not intend to add anything to them. It understands the anxieties of the French Government and its desire to receive supplementary assurances. But it is convinced that the French Government will understand, for its part, the reasons that have always prevented this country [England] from taking in advance new and extensive commitments toward the European continent.

His Majesty's Government has frequently reaffirmed in recent times that, for reasons deriving both from its internal policy and from its association with the other members of the Commonwealth, it was impossible for it to alienate in advance its freedom of maneuver and to assume in Europe any commitment

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. "M. Paul-Boncour insists that His Majesty's Government declare publicly that, if France gave assistance to Czechoslovakia in the event that the latter were attacked by Germany, England would be at its side." (Telegram no. 34, R. 2674/162/12 from Sir Eric Phipps to Viscount Halifax, Documents on British Foreign Policy, I, no. 81, p. 50.)

2. At the end of the meeting held at St. James's Palace, on the day after the reoccupation of the Rhineland by Hitler, England renewed the commitment to give assistance to France should the latter be attacked by Germany.

[[PDF page 314]]

other than those contained in the Treaty of Locarno and in the Covenant of the League of Nations. As it already told President Chautemps and M. Delbos on 29 November last, His Majesty's Government will certainly not go so far as to declare what its attitude would be if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia. Consequently, it is not in a position to contract in advance the obligation to assist France in cases not covered by the Treaty of Locarno...

... It is undeniable that the military position of Czechoslovakia has been seriously weakened by the incorporation of Austria into the Reich. The absence of fortifications along the Austro-Czechoslovak frontier exposes the heart of Czechoslovakia to a German attack. There is little hope, however, that military operations undertaken against Germany by the two countries that have contracted obligations toward Czechoslovakia — France and the Soviet Union — could be conducted in a sufficiently rapid and effective manner to prevent the occupation of Czechoslovakia on the day when Germany decided to attack it. Consequently, the restoration of Czechoslovakia would have to await the victorious conclusion of the campaign undertaken by those who had resorted to arms to defend it. In any case, it is to be presumed that this war would be long and, if His Majesty's Government found itself engaged in it, it would not be in a position to bring to it from the beginning a contribution of a nature to ensure a rapid victorious conclusion...

This note, which clearly defines the English position, caused a real shock to the French Government. When Daladier and Bonnet succeed Blum and Paul-Boncour (10 April 1938), they hope that the British leaders, being of conservative tendencies, will show themselves more accommodating toward them than toward their predecessors of the Popular Front. It is with this intention that they go to London on

28 and 29 April. But from

[[PDF page 315]]

the outset they collide with Chamberlain's determination.

Bonnet explains to him that, in his eyes, the Anschluss has only been the prelude to the destruction of Czechoslovakia, and that the subversive activity of the Sudetens risks bringing about its breakup. "The region of Teschen would be given to Poland; Hungary would obtain Slovakia under some status of autonomy or other. As for the Czechs, they would constitute a small State whose weakness would compel it to remain in the Germanic orbit. Such events are to be expected in the near future. Great Britain and France must not allow themselves to be surprised once again by a new violation of the treaties."

Daladier supports these pessimistic forecasts. But Bonnet's exhortations leave Chamberlain perfectly cold.

"Never will the English people," he replies, "and still less the Dominions, so attached to the idea of the right of peoples to dispose of themselves, accept that the British Government should make war to prevent a plebiscite from allowing populations forming part of Europe to express their will. If Beneš had granted liberal treatment to the German minorities he annexed — as he had undertaken to do in 1919 — the present crisis would have been avoided. But to this is added another consideration: England disarmed from 1925 to 1935. She has only just established new naval and air armament programs. Only when they are completed will England be in a condition to face a conflict."

Bonnet and Daladier try to convince their interlocutors of the imminence of the peril. In vain. They are so firmly anchored in their positions and the discussion grows so heated that Chamberlain will write the next day to an intimate friend: "Fortunately, nothing of this dispute has leaked out, and the newspapers have not known how close we came to a rupture with the French ministers."

Not wishing to leave London on so painful a break, Bonnet proposes a middle term:

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Georges Bonnet, Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 191. The minutes of the London conversations are reproduced in extenso in Documents on British Foreign Policy, I, p. 222.

2. In July, when Chamberlain asks Arthur Robinson of the Supply Board: "In how much time shall we be in a position to face Germany with more or less equal forces?" Robinson replies: "In one year." (Keith Feiling, op. cit., p. 350.) When Daladier asks Gamelin when he will be in a position to make a serious offensive on land, the Commander-in-Chief replies: "Not before two years, at least." (Bonnet, Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 228.)

[[PDF page 316]]

"The worst can happen," he declares, "if France and England do not act in solidarity. On the other hand, the union of the two countries, if it asserts itself strongly, may perhaps prevent Hitler from throwing himself upon Czechoslovakia. The country would then be saved, and without war..."

Without war! This word has touched Chamberlain's sensitivity more sharply than all the preceding

arguments.

“We are ready to try this experiment with you,” replies the British Prime Minister after a moment of reflection. “If our common diplomatic action can truly make it possible to arrive at an amicable arrangement between Prague and Berlin, so much the better! But know that we are not bound to go beyond that.”

Such is the extreme limit of his concessions — a limit that he will not cross at any moment of the crisis.

Returning to Paris, Bonnet reports to Stefan Osusky the tenor of his London conversations. He does not hide from him the mediocrity of the military situation, and he specifies that Daladier and he have obtained English support not to give Czechoslovakia armed assistance in case of war, but to settle the Sudeten affair amicably. He asks him to warn Beneš of this and to insist that the Czech Government reach an arrangement as rapidly as possible. The Czechoslovak minister in Paris telegraphs Prague that very evening, emphasizing the advice Bonnet has just given him (30 April 1938).

Was it the receipt of this message that caused to germinate in Beneš’s mind the idea of forcing the Western democracies, especially France, to take a more energetic position toward Germany by spreading the news of its mobilization (20 May)? We do not have confirmation of this, but the closeness of the two dates does not exclude this hypothesis. The repeated interventions of Sir Nevile Henderson at the Wilhelmstrasse and Ribbentrop’s precipitate departure for Berchtesgaden led certain newspapers to publish articles asserting that

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Georges Bonnet, Le Quai d’Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 192.

2. France, especially. For Beneš, duly informed by Jan Masaryk, his ambassador in London, is aware of the English intentions and has few illusions about the aid he can expect from them.

[[PDF page 317]]

if Germany made any show of resorting to force, England and France would march hand in hand and would not hesitate to declare war on her. These rumors, so little in conformity with Chamberlain’s real intentions, seem dangerous to him because of the unfounded hopes they might arouse. He cannot deny them publicly without weakening his own position. But he addresses to the French Government, in the night of 22 to 23 May, a note that leaves no room for ambiguity:

It is of the highest importance, one reads there, that the French Government have no illusion about the attitude of the British Government, insofar as it can be predicted at this moment. The British Government has given the most serious warnings to Berlin, and it must be hoped that they will prevent the German Government from taking extreme measures. But it would be altogether dangerous for the French Government to exaggerate the scope of these warnings.

The British Government will always fulfill its commitment to come to the aid of France if she is the victim of unprovoked aggression by Germany. In that case, it will employ all the forces at its disposal. But if the French Government concluded from this that the British Government would immediately take part, with it, in joint military action to preserve Czechoslovakia against German aggression, it is only fair to warn the French Government that our declarations and our commitments in no way justify such a supposition.

The British Government considers that the military situation is such that France and England, even with the assistance they might receive from Russia, would not be in a position to prevent Germany from submerging Czechoslovakia. The only result would be a European war whose outcome would be at the very least extremely doubtful.

The British Government absolutely counts on the French Government undertaking to consult it and to give it the opportunity to express its views before any action that could make its position more difficult.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The English Government is nevertheless in a delicate position. It must do three things at once: restrain Hitler from going forward, slow down France, and press Beneš to come to terms with the Sudetens. All the notes transmitted during this period by Great Britain's diplomatic representatives in Berlin, Prague, and Paris aim to achieve this triple result, emphasizing now one, now another aspect of this policy.

2. Note from the British Government delivered by Sir Eric Phipps on 22 May 1938 to M. Édouard Daladier and read by the French President of the Council to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber, meeting in secret session.

[[PDF page 318]]

"It is appropriate," adds Sir Eric Phipps after reading this note to President Daladier, "to make a considerable effort with the Government of Prague to make it understand the necessity of an amicable settlement of the Sudeten problem."

This time again, as on 22 March and 28 April, the English position could not be expressed more clearly...

On his return from London, Bonnet has informed Stefan Osusky of his talks with Lord Halifax and Chamberlain. Now he turns toward Warsaw to know the intentions of the Polish Government. On 27 May, he asks M. Lukasiewicz, Polish ambassador in Paris, what his government's attitude would be if the U.S.S.R. asked authorization to move its troops through Polish territory or to have its aircraft fly over it.

"If the U.S.S.R. tries it, it will be war!" replies the Polish ambassador without hesitation. "The Franco-Polish alliance obliges us to support you only if you are attacked by Germany and not in the contrary case... Czechoslovakia is already a dead State. You are wrong to want to resurrect it. The only reasonable policy consists in resigning oneself to its dislocation, reserving for Poland an important part of its territories, especially Teschen."

Bonnet is dismayed by this declaration.

"Do you not think that Poland might one day be attacked by Germany and suffer the same fate?" he asks the ambassador. "Stresemann himself told me, ten years ago, that Germany would never accept the situation imposed on her at Danzig and in the Polish Corridor. It is therefore necessary that Poland maintain good relations with the U.S.S.R. It cannot be at odds with both its powerful neighbors at once!"

But M. Lukasiewicz refuses to enter into these views. His intransigence astonishes the French minister. He knows the Poles' antipathy for the Czechs; he knows that they have not forgiven the "stab in the back of Teschen." But so much passion seems unreasonable to him. In speaking

[[PDF page 319]]

as he does, does the ambassador truly express the point of view of his government?

To find out, he asks M. Léon Noël, French ambassador in Warsaw, to question Colonel Beck and Marshal Rydz-Śmigły on this subject. M. Noël sees them on 26 May and 3 June. Alas! Their answers are just as negative as the ambassador's remarks:

"Rydz-Śmigły left me with the impression that he did not believe in the possibility of saving Czechoslovakia," Léon Noël writes in his report of 3 June, "and that as a consequence Poland had to keep its hands free for every eventuality... Outside the cases provided for by our agreements, we cannot, in any degree, count at this moment on Poland."

What the report does not say is the growing impatience of the Polish leaders at the idea that the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia might be accomplished without them.

Meanwhile, the negotiations between Prague and the Sudetens are marking time. The talks, conducted by Milan Hodža and Kamil Krofta for the Czechs, by Conrad Henlein and Karl Frank for the German minority, have still led to nothing. MM. Beneš and Hodža may multiply reassuring declarations; the discussion is at a dead point.

"That the Germans will finally obtain the right to administer themselves leaves no doubt," affirms

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. On 14 March 1938, M. Lipski, Polish ambassador in Berlin, suggests to his government that it enter into talks with Berlin in order to elaborate a common plan concerning Czechoslovakia, for fear of arriving too late if the necessary arrangements are not made in time. (Count Jan Szembek, Journal, 14 March 1938, p. 292.) On 13 June, Lipski seeks to provoke a meeting with Göring in order to work out the modalities of common action against Czechoslovakia, notably in the form of economic pressure. (Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, p. 255.) Finally, the Polish authorities increasingly actively support the demands of the Hungarian minority and of the Slovak Autonomist Party of Monsignor Hlinka, upon whom — signal honor — they have conferred the order Polonia Restituta, the highest Polish decoration.

3. The President of the Council and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, onto whom Beneš has unloaded the essential part of the negotiation. They are assisted, from time to time, by M. Emil Hácha, President of the Council of State (Oberster Verwaltungsgericht).

[[PDF page 320]]

M. Hodža. "The only problem consists in defining the extent of this self-administration in such a way that it satisfies the legitimate aspirations of the Germans without infringing the sovereignty and authority of the State."

That is indeed where the knot of the problem lies. How could the Czechoslovak State transform itself

from top to bottom while remaining what it is?

The British Government is growing impatient at this slowness. It attributes the cause to the fact that France is not exerting sufficient pressure on Prague. At the London Conference of 28 and 29 April, Bonnet and Chamberlain agreed to combine their diplomatic actions to bring the Czechoslovak Government to settle the Sudeten problem as quickly as possible. The British Prime Minister regarded this suggestion as a formal agreement, thanks to which Franco-British solidarity could be safeguarded. Now he finds that France is not applying it with sufficient vigor. Convinced that "the impulse must come from London," he decides to intensify his pressure on Beneš by pushing the French Government to tell him clearly that it will see itself obliged to denounce the Franco-Czech agreements and to reconsider its whole policy toward his country if the talks with the Sudetens do not rapidly succeed.

To induce the French Government to this, Lord Halifax

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Interview granted by M. Hodža to the correspondent of the Sunday Times, 12 June 1938.

2. "I am certain," M. Beneš declares for his part, "that we shall arrive very rapidly — perhaps in the course of the days or weeks to come — at finding a fair and understanding solution to the nationality problems... and that thus war can be avoided." (Speech delivered at Prague, 30 June 1938.) But the semi-official Czech press immediately takes the contrary line: "We are in no way disposed to look on as passive spectators at the upheaval of the State desired by M. Henlein," writes Národní Noviny, the official organ of the Národní Sdružení Party. "We say it bluntly and without circumlocution: we do not believe at all in the possibility of an agreement with Henlein's Germans. We know their demands... We shall never give our approval to the solution that Henlein and Berlin would like to impose on us... We must have the courage to tell our French and English friends that their efforts will fail hopelessly if they think they can lead us to make concessions to Berlin." (Cited by the Frankfurter Zeitung of 2 July 1938.)

5. "I think it desirable," M. Basil Newton wrote to Lord Halifax, "that very strong pressure be maintained on Prague by the Reich, as well as by England and, if possible, by France." [Documents on British Foreign Policy, I, 124.] He even goes so far as to advocate the neutralization of Czechoslovakia. (Ibid., pp. 134, 140.)

[[PDF page 321]]

instructs Sir Eric Phipps to go see Georges Bonnet to ask him to send instructions in this sense to M. de Lacroix, French minister in Prague. Bonnet raises no objection on the substance. He admits that the French representative will even have to go "a little further" than his British colleague. But he prefers that the two governments act separately, a common approach risking alerting opinion and pushing the Germans to some ill-considered gesture. Halifax approves this way of proceeding.

M. Bonnet therefore has M. Osusky come once again. He reads him the English note of 22 May and does not hide from him that the British ministers are increasingly astonished to see Beneš conduct the negotiation with such slowness.

"The English," he continues, "threaten to withdraw their support from me if Beneš delays any longer in concluding an agreement. Let him take advantage of the present lull to settle the question at all costs, by very broad concessions. But he must hurry. Among the Sudeten leaders, several remain hostile to a

pure and simple attachment to Germany, which would make them disappear from the political scene. Hasten to deal with them. There is not a minute to lose! Do not forget that England gives us only diplomatic support and that it wishes to take no obligation toward you in case of conflict. Now, without English support, we can do nothing effective for you. Do not content yourself with sending a telegram. Go see MM. Beneš and Hodža yourself. Explain clearly to them

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. “Because of the special relations that unite France to Czechoslovakia,” writes Sir Eric Phipps, “I suggest that the French Government go one step further [than we do] and warn M. Beneš that if, through his fault, the chance of arriving at a settlement were missed, the French Government would be compelled to revise its own position toward Czechoslovakia.” (Celovsky, op. cit., p. 258, note 2.)

4. That is not the question. The English asked him to signify to Prague the possibility of a denunciation of the Franco-Czech Pact. But Bonnet does not breathe a word of it, either in his conversation or in his aide-mémoire. There are several reasons for this. First, he has made no commitment on this subject to Lord Halifax. Next, he is reluctant to brandish this threat for fear of being followed neither by the Cabinet nor by Parliament. Finally, M. Alexis Léger, Secretary-General of the Quai d’Orsay, seems to oppose France’s energetically supporting this desire of England. (Cf. Celovsky, op. cit., p. 259, note 4.) As for M. Massigli, Director of Political Affairs, he finds it deplorable “that the French Government should constantly be placed in London’s wake, the government most committed sheltering behind the one that is least so.” {Le Figaro, 1 April 1964.}

[[PDF page 322]]

the situation. Do not let them fall asleep in dangerous illusions.” To give more weight to his words, Bonnet gives Osusky an aide-mémoire.

Unfortunately, relations between Osusky and Beneš are no longer what they once were. Since Bonnet fears that his authority will not be sufficient to modify the attitude of the President of the Republic, he decides to support his intervention by a parallel démarche by M. de Lacroix.

Masaryk’s successor is an obstinate man. Moreover, he has an unfortunate propensity to believe himself infallible. To Bertrand de Jouvenel, whom he received the day after the Anschluss and who drew his attention to the danger to which his country was exposed, he replied serenely:

“I am amply informed about the German forces. They are all façade. The Czech forces will easily hold them in check. As for French superiority, it is so immense that your armies will enter Germany without difficulty.”

Jouvenel left this conversation “more dismayed than convinced.” How can Beneš maintain such illusions, he who boasts of possessing the best intelligence service in the world? This is because he no longer listens to anyone except those who present things to him as he wishes them to be. Since the Anschluss, Prague has been submerged by a flood of refugees — Communists, Social Democrats, Jews,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Georges Bonnet, Le Quai d’Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 197. Bonnet’s argument comes down to this: “Hurry to reach a result, otherwise Franco-British solidarity will no longer function; if the English refuse us their support, France will be able to do nothing for you; as a result, the Franco-Czech Pact

will have become void." Boris Celovsky remarks on this subject: "The French Minister of Foreign Affairs succeeds in this diplomatic tour de force: threatening the Prague Government with non-execution of the Franco-Czech Pact without pronouncing a single time the name of this treaty." {Das Münchener Abkommen, p. 258.}

2. Being Slovak, Osusky was moved by the measures of centralization taken by Beneš — especially in the school domain. He made a few observations on this subject to Beneš, who took them very badly. (See above, p. 186, note 5.)

4. The Communists regard Czechoslovakia as "the advanced bastion of communism in the heart of Europe" and the Czechoslovak Communist Party as "the spearhead of world revolution." (Declaration of the Czech Communist deputy Kopecký, 20 January 1936.) Their action rests on a great number of organizations

[[PDF page 323]]

and Freemasons — who fled Vienna at the arrival of German troops and who aspire to only one thing: to return there as quickly as possible. Day after day, these people repeat to him that Hitler's power is only a myth, that the entire German people aspire to free itself from him, and that it will be enough to stand up to him to provoke his fall. Their assertions, which confirm his own hopes, rest on analogous declarations made by German emigrants installed in London, Paris, Moscow, and Washington.

"The Western peoples must conspire before the face of the world in order to defend our ideals by force!" cries Emil Ludwig during a conference organized by the Labour Party.

"The means of rescuing the German people?" asks Heinrich Mann on his side. "It is simply to deliver it from Hitler and his regime. To achieve this, would it not be worthwhile to renounce for a time a principle that has become impracticable and obsolete? I mean the preconceived idea of not interfering in the internal affairs of another country... Democrats who desire to safeguard civilization have no choice: Hitler must disappear!"

Thomas Mann, the celebrated writer, adds in these terms:

"No people in the present world is as little in a condition to conduct a war as the German people. It would have no ally. Not one in the world. That is the first danger, but not the least. For Germany would be

and Marxist leagues: the League of Socialist Free Thinkers, the League against Imperialism, the League for the Development of Proletarian Culture, International Aid to Prisoners of the Class Struggle (which is a section of International Red Aid), the League for Progress, the World League for Sexual Reform, the Federation of Progressive Students, the Guild of Combat Cooperatives, the International League of Women against War and Fascism, the New World Fraternity, etc. Let us add that almost all the leaders of Austrian Social Democracy, notably Otto Bauer and Julius Deutsch, have taken refuge in Czechoslovakia since February 1934 (see vol. IV, p. 425), where they engage in intense political propaganda.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Beneš belongs to the Lodge Pravda Vítězí, founded on 26 October 1918 and attached to the Grand Orient of France. In 1931, the Grand Orient of Czechoslovakia (Veliký Orient Československý) was

created, possessing three lodges in Prague, Brno, and Bratislava. Among its members are Brothers Gottwald, Dragow, and Ackermann, who have, on the one hand, close ties with the Grand Orient of France and, on the other, with the Executive Committee of the Communist International in Moscow. Their thesis, expressed by Moravec, the Grand Master of Czech Masonry, is that “Prague is the link that connects France to Soviet Russia.” (Tažení v Habeši a válečné možnosti ve Střední Europe, Prague, 1937.)

[[PDF page 324]]

abandoned to herself. Reduced and humiliated from the spiritual point of view, morally emptied of her substance, full of a profound distrust toward her leaders... such would be her state of mind at the beginning of the war. No, this war is impossible. Germany cannot wage it. And if her leaders have the slightest good sense, the assurances they give concerning their pacifism are not what they would like their supporters to believe with a complicit wink, namely tactical lies. They come from the anxiety they feel when thinking of this impossibility...”

If Beneš seeks to gain time, it is because he is convinced that time is working for him, that is, for all those who are hostile to a negotiated solution and who do not cease saying in editorial offices, in the corridors of Parliaments, and even within ministerial Cabinets, that war is inevitable, that the moment has come to liquidate Hitlerism and ensure the triumph of the democracies. Having experienced for himself the power of these thousands of visible or secret agents who create currents of opinion, and having called all his friends to the rescue, he awaits with confidence the ground swell that will “reverse the trend” and sweep away all those who hesitate to resort to arms. That is why he attaches no more importance to the French démarche than to Osusky’s intervention.

When Halifax realizes that nothing has changed in the attitude of the Prague Government, he wonders what is going on. He insists on seeing the note handed by Bonnet to Osusky and can scarcely conceal his ill humor when he reads its contents. He would have wanted the French to use threatening language toward the Czechs, to put a knife to their throat! And here, instead of an ultimatum, he finds himself in the presence of a text full of nuances, where the possible rupture of the Franco-Czech Pact is not even mentioned! Already the English ministers felt only limited sympathy for Bonnet. From this moment on, they

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Le Droit de vie, organ of the International League against Antisemitism, 19 June 1937.

[[PDF page 325]]

observe him with mistrust. “If he has not exerted sufficient pressure on Prague,” they say to themselves, “it is no doubt because he has not taken our declarations seriously enough.” In that case, they will take charge of making him understand that he is mistaken.

From 19 to 22 July, George VI and Queen Elizabeth make their first official journey to France. They are received there with as much pomp as cordiality. A great military review is organized in their honor. (“50,000 soldiers parade before the King. 600 aircraft fly over the Palace of Versailles. Impressive demonstration of French military strength,” the Prague newspapers proclaim that very evening.) President Lebrun invites the British sovereigns to a banquet of six hundred covers in the Hall of Mirrors. During the address he delivers at the end of the meal, George VI celebrates the Entente Cordiale and declares “that it is impossible to recall a period when relations between England and

France have been more intimate.” The public deduces that the two countries are marching hand in hand. But as soon as Their Majesties have departed, Lord Halifax reminds the French Government that the dispositions of the Foreign Office remain unchanged.

In the course of August, General Vuillemin is invited to return in Berlin the visit that General Milch, State Secretary for Aviation and Göring’s deputy, made to him in Paris a few weeks earlier.

Hitler, who has been anxious to give much publicity to the construction of the western fortifications, desires — for the same reasons — that the head of the French Air Force be shown the full power of the Luftwaffe. From 17 to 22 August, General Vuillemin is taken from design bureau to factory, and from training camp to testing center. On the 18th, he goes to Döberitz, where he attends the evolutions of the Manfred von Richthofen fighter wing. At the end of the morning, he is taken to Leipzig, to the factory where the Messerschmitt 109 is built. In the afternoon, he is shown the Augsburg factory, where the twin-engine Messerschmitt 110 fighter is manufactured.

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2. The heir to the traditions of the squadron of the same name, which Göring commanded at the end of the First World War.

[[PDF page 326]]

The day of 19 August, spent at the Tactical Experimentation Center of Barth, on the Baltic, will leave General Vuillemin with the most striking memory of his journey.

“The program begins at the Zingst firing range,” General Stehlin tells us, “in the form of exercises carried out by a large number of combat aircraft, of all types in service in the German air forces. After the classical bombings, carried out by formations flying at high altitude and intercepted near the objectives for the needs of the show, the operation continues with dive-bombing carried out by about fifty aircraft against fixed and moving targets... This demonstration of the power of air interventions and of the degree of tactical training of the German Air Force lasts for three hours... General Vuillemin, General d’Astier de la Vigerie, and the officers accompanying him do not hide their astonishment.”

When the sea breeze dissipates the clouds of dust and smoke formed by the explosion of the bombs, the French officers exchange their impressions. Despite certain reservations concerning the vulnerability of dive-bombing, they are obliged to agree “that the mass of aircraft Germany could employ represents a power and numerical superiority that can no longer be compared to the offensive, and probably defensive, value of French aviation.”

The next day, 20 August, is devoted to the visit to the Heinkel aircraft factory at Oranienburg, near Berlin. The twin-engine Heinkel 111 bomber is manufactured there in large series. General Milch draws General Vuillemin’s attention especially to the aircraft called Heinkel 100, which has just broken the world speed record.

To conclude, General Vuillemin is received at Karinhall by Marshal Göring. Going straight to the point, the Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe suddenly puts the crucial question to him:

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Stehlin deduces from this “that everything he had written on this subject to his minister had not been read with much attention.” (Témoignage pour l'histoire, p. 90.)

HISTORY OF THE GERMAN ARMY, V: THE TRIALS OF STRENGTH (1938)
Benoist-Méchin

English translation — Section 7 of 10
PDF pages 327–374
Translation note: rapid, accuracy-focused translation from the corrected embedded text layer. No new OCR was performed. Page markers from the source text are preserved.

[[PDF page 327]]

“What will you do if circumstances oblige us to attack Czechoslovakia?”

Vuillemin hesitates for a moment, then replies:

“France will remain faithful to her word!”

Göring appears surprised. This is plainly not the answer he had hoped for. For some time he tries to make Vuillemin withdraw his assertion. But his efforts are vain: the head of the French Air Force is a soldier who does not want to let himself be drawn into a political discussion.

Yet, in the car taking him back from Karinhall, he tells François-Poncet of his fears and, before leaving Berlin, tells General de Geffrier and Colonel Stehlin of his stupefaction and his uneasiness at everything he has seen and heard. And they have not even shown him the Dorniers 17, the Junkers 52, and the Junkers 88, whose appearance on the French front during the winter of 1939–1940 will be a total surprise for our fighter pilots.

Returning to Paris, he goes to see Georges Bonnet and depicts the situation to him in its starkest light:

“If we have war,” he tells him, “within two weeks French aviation will be annihilated. I have only two aircraft of recent model to set against the whole German fleet!”

A little later, he will confirm this fact to Daladier, adding:

“In case of war, I shall tender my resignation as Chief of the Air Force, asking your permission

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3. The Junkers 52 can carry more than 40 men with their weapons. It proved itself during the Spanish war. A squadron of 12 Junkers 52, belonging to the Condor Legion and making thirty to forty round trips a day, thus transported, in mid-September 1936, nearly 13,000 men, one and a half tons of ammunition, about a hundred machine-guns, and field guns. (Stehlin, op. cit., pp. 152–153.)

4. “The Junkers 88,” writes Paul Stehlin, “was of exceptional value for its time, for it was a twin-engine aircraft designed at once for conventional night and day bombing, low-level bombing, dive-bombing, strategic reconnaissance, and even night fighting.” (Témoignage pour l'histoire, p. 118.)

6. The German aircraft fly at a speed of 480 to 530 km per hour; most French aircraft do not exceed

350. General Vuillemin went to Germany in a bomber prototype of which only one example exists. His escort had to travel in another aircraft, much slower, which had to be sent off in advance so that it could arrive in Berlin at the same time as the Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force.

[[PDF page 328]]

to get into an aircraft and die while going to bomb Berlin!”

Such declarations are obviously not calculated to push MM. Daladier and Bonnet toward intransigence. All the more so because at the moment when Germany is displaying her forces, England seems to be making a point of demonstrating her weakness to them. From the data collected in high places by General Lelong, it emerges that her land army is practically nonexistent, that her air force still has only a few hundred modern aircraft capable of standing up to the German squadrons, and that her fleet can provide no help to France in the Mediterranean. Worse still: in case of war, the British Admiralty asks France to send it one of her modern units — the Dunkerque or the Strasbourg — to help protect Franco-English convoys against German submarines.

On 10 September, wanting to get to the bottom of the matter, Bonnet summons Sir Eric Phipps and puts to him the following, crucial question:

“Up to now, we have hoped with you that a friendly arrangement might be reached between the Sudetens and Prague. Today, that hope is forbidden us: we must look reality in the face. Tomorrow, Germany may attack Czechoslovakia; in that case, France will mobilize at once and will turn toward you, saying: ‘We are marching. Are you marching with us?’ What will Great Britain’s answer be?” And Georges Bonnet adds: “If a war occurs, England and France will be too intimately associated in trials as in

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Georges Bonnet, Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois Républiques, pp. 208–209: “We were two years behind the Germans for the army,” he writes, “and five years for the aeronautical industries.”

3. Its effectives amount, in all, to 230,000 men, including the reserve of the regular army and rear services. (Report of General Lelong to M. Corbin, French Ambassador in London, 5 October 1938.) It can be seen that Joseph Kennedy, United States Ambassador in London, was not wrong to write: “Chamberlain could not have fought, even if he had wanted to.” (Fabre-Luce, L'Enjeu de la diplomatie, de Munich à nos jours, Revue des Deux Mondes, 1 March 1963, p. 30.)

4. By Churchill’s own admission, the R.A.F. possesses in all only five fighter squadrons. (War Memoirs, I, The Gathering Storm, pp. 346–347.)

[[PDF page 329]]

successes for us not to speak today with complete frankness. Thus it is less to the ambassador than to the friend that I am addressing myself at this moment.”

“I understand your question very well,” replies Sir Eric Phipps. “It may be difficult to answer it without knowing the circumstances that might bring it up, but your concern is legitimate and I shall write at once to the Secretary of State at the Foreign Office.”

The Ambassador of Great Britain immediately transmits this request to his government. On 14 September, Sir Eric Phipps brings Georges Bonnet the reply of the English Government, in the form of a personal letter addressed on 12 September by Lord Halifax to the Ambassador of Great Britain in Paris:

Foreign Office, 12 September 1938.

My dear Phipps,

I received yesterday your personal and confidential letter of 10 September conveying to me the question Bonnet put to you, addressing himself not to the Ambassador but to a friend.

I naturally realize how important it would be for the French Government to receive a clear answer to such a question but, as you pointed out to Bonnet (and I think I may say that your language was admirable), the question itself, although clear in form, cannot be dissociated from the circumstances in which it might be put, circumstances which at this moment are necessarily quite hypothetical.

Moreover, in this question, it is impossible for His Majesty’s Government to consider only its own situation, especially since in any decision or action it might decide or take, it would in fact commit the Dominions. Their governments would very certainly object to having their position decided for them before circumstances arose of which they would wish to be the judges themselves.

Therefore, at this moment, the only reply I am in a position to make to M. Bonnet’s question is the following: while His Majesty’s Government would never permit the security of France to be threatened, it is not in a position to give details as to the character of its future action or as to the

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1. The terms of this letter were weighed and finalized during a British Cabinet meeting.

moment at which it would be taken, in circumstances which it cannot foresee at present.

Sincerely yours,

Halifax.

Since England assures him that she will never allow the security of France to be threatened, Bonnet then asks:

“What help can we expect from Great Britain on land and in the air in the event that France herself is the object of German aggression?”

London replies:

“Two non-motorized divisions and 150 aircraft for the first six months of the war.”

Bonnet is left breathless. Thus, in case of a Franco-German conflict, English help on land would be five times smaller than in 1914!

“If M. Bonnet was truly seeking an excuse to abandon the Czechs,” Churchill will later write, “it must be admitted that he had not sought in vain.”

Then on whom can one count? On the U.S.S.R.? On America?

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1. Georges Bonnet, Défense de la Paix, I, Appendix III, pp. 360–361. Not wishing to be satisfied with the reading of this letter, Bonnet asks Phipps to leave him a copy so that he can show it to the members of the French Government. After asking permission from the head of the Foreign Office, Phipps consents. Halifax would no doubt have preferred to keep this communication oral.

2. Figures confirmed by General Lelong. He even reduces the number of aircraft to 120. According to a table given by M. Guy La Chambre, Air Minister, to Georges Bonnet in September 1939, monthly British construction of war aircraft is 160 aircraft, distributed as follows: 30 fighters, whose speed is between 415 and 520 km/h; 120 bombers, with a maximum speed above 400 km; 10 cooperation aircraft whose maximum speed is above 360 km. (La Défense de la Paix, I, Appendix IX, p. 374.)

3. Winston Churchill, War Memoirs, I, The Gathering Storm, p. 304. “Of course,” writes Bonnet, “I was seeking no excuse. On the contrary, I deplored the fact that we were so poorly supported by our English allies.” (Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 207.)

[[PDF page 331]]

XVI
THE DIPLOMATIC IMPASSE
III. — The United States and the U.S.S.R. save themselves from difficulty.

“That is good work!” Roosevelt declared to M. de Saint-Quentin on 26 May 1938, recalling the démarches made a few days earlier by Sir Nevile Henderson at the Wilhelmstrasse, when Prague mobilized five classes of reservists. “Those people [the dictators] understand only force!” Then he repeated several times, shaking his closed fists like a boxer in the ring: “That is how one must speak to them!”

This language exactly corresponds to the feelings of the President of the United States. One finds in it his insurmountable aversion to fascist regimes, his conviction that the British warnings had in fact impressed Hitler, his somewhat naïve confidence in press declarations, and his hope that Paris and London would adopt an inflexible line of conduct in the Czechoslovak affair.

His certainty that the destinies of the democracies are linked is no less evident, for he adds: “If France succumbed, we too would go under.” That is why the efforts made by Bullitt and Georges Bonnet to

induce the

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1. The French ambassador in Washington, where he had succeeded Georges Bonnet.

3. Reports of M. de Saint-Quentin of 26 May and 18 June 1938, on his conversation with Roosevelt. (Roosevelts Weg in den Krieg, Geheimdokumente zur Kriegspolitik des Präsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten, Berlin, 1943, pp. 8–9.)

4. The United States Ambassador in Paris. Although fundamentally anti-fascist, Bullitt considers that conciliation is inevitable. Soviet historiographers today

White House to exert pressure on Prague, in order to bring Beneš to settle the Sudeten affair quickly, find no echo with him. Bullitt may suggest to him in vain that he invite Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy to meet in conference at The Hague “to find a peaceful solution to their disputes”; he may implore him in vain to summon M. de Saint-Quentin to the White House, to tell him “that he hopes France will not commit suicide,” and to ask him for authorization to use the same language with Daladier; Roosevelt takes no account of it. On 28 May, he charges Secretary of State Cordell Hull to publish a declaration recalling that the Briand-Kellogg Pact is still in force and affirming that no conflict could remain localized. “We cannot close our eyes,” declares Hull, “to the fact that recourse to hostilities, wherever it might be, would introduce into the world a factor of generalized trouble, whose distant consequences no one can foresee, but of which we know that it would cause permanent and unforeseeable damage to all nations.”

Unfortunately, Roosevelt’s personal sympathies are one thing; political realities are another. There therefore exists a dangerous gap between the words he can pronounce and the acts he can accomplish. To preach firmness to one’s friends, when one can bring them no material help, is quickly to place oneself in a thorny situation. Bound hand and foot by a reluctant public opinion and by a recalcitrant Congress, Roosevelt will not be long in perceiving it.

Already the speech he delivered in Chicago on 5 October 1937, in which he proposed to quarantine “the [totalitarian] countries that violate treaties, flout the noblest human instincts, and have no respect for international morality,” had not met with the success he expected. It brought the isolationists to harden their positions and

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accuse him today of having been “an agent of Hitler.” One knows the weight that should be attached to this sort of accusation.

2. This is the Pact putting war “outside the law,” signed in Paris on 27 August 1928.

4. These have no difficulty evoking the disillusionments harvested by the American delegation at the Peace Conference, and repeat that the Sudeten problem would not arise if one had kept to Wilson’s Fourteen Points.

[[PDF page 333]]

an entire part of the press reacted to it with acrimony. As for Chamberlain, he expressed his opinion on this subject in a letter to his sister: “I read Roosevelt’s speech with mixed feelings,” he wrote to her, “for I perceive that the patients suffering from contagious diseases are also heavily armed... There is something wrong in his analogy. When I proposed to the United States that we make a common démarche, at the beginning of the [Sino-Japanese] quarrel, they refused. The best and safest thing, with the Americans, is never to expect anything from them except words.”

A few weeks later, the states signatory to the Nine-Power Treaty met in Brussels to condemn Japanese aggression against China (3–24 November 1937). Their representatives delivered fiery speeches there, but their final verdict was drafted in such vague terms that it did not allow Roosevelt to apply to Japan the sanctions he hoped for. This negative attitude was a great disillusionment for him, as for those among his advisers who readily poured oil on the fire of his interventionism.

A new setback occurred at the beginning of the following year, and this time it was very humiliating for the President of the United States. On 11 January 1938, Roosevelt informed Chamberlain that he planned to convene an international conference in Washington “in order to define the broad lines of common action in favor of peace.” It was a skillful way to reassure the isolationists while drawing America out of her isolation. When this message arrived at Downing Street, Eden was on holiday. Chamberlain made a face on becoming acquainted with it. Engaged in difficult negotiations with Italy, he considers Roosevelt impulsive and muddled, and thinks it better to keep him away from delicate European affairs. Without waiting for Eden’s return,

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1. See vol. IV, p. 76. The New York Herald Tribune, the New York Sun, the Boston Herald, the Boston Post, the Chicago Tribune, the Detroit Free Press, the Minneapolis Tribune, the Spokesman-Review, the Catholic World, and Ave Maria openly criticized this speech. The Philadelphia Inquirer blamed “his aggressive pacifism”; the San Francisco Examiner advised Roosevelt “not to get too big for his boots”; and the Christian Century predicted “that a new world war would profit, in the end, only China and Russia.” (Issue of 20 October 1937, pp. 1287–1288.)

2. Chamberlain alludes to his fruitless efforts to bring the United States into line with the English position in the Far East. (See vol. IV, p. 43.)

[[PDF page 334]]

he replied to his proposal with a categorical refusal.

This refusal hurt Roosevelt as a personal affront.

“If a police commissioner makes an agreement with the chief gangsters of his district,” he cried angrily, “and if that agreement has the effect of stopping hold-ups, he will deserve the name of a great man. But if the gangsters do not keep their word, the police commissioner will go to prison. Certain people, in my opinion, trust too much to their luck.”

Although Eden will protest on his return against what he considers “a monumental political blunder,” he will no longer succeed in repairing the broken dishes. Chamberlain is too deeply committed to the path of conciliation to be able to go back. Grieved by what he considers a rupture of harness between London and Washington, and alarmed by the eagerness that the British Cabinet seems to be showing in reconciling itself with Mussolini, Eden gives his resignation. Chamberlain accepts it. Roosevelt then understands that his counsels of firmness have come six months too late.

1. “As regards Germany and Italy, our plan is founded on the observation that both these countries are capable of making a contribution that will bring us nearer the objective we desire. It is useless to discuss whether our contribution is greater than theirs... I mention these facts so that the President may realize that his proposal risks compromising the efforts we are making here. It is probable that the Italian and German Governments, from whom we shall have to ask concessions, will consent to them only on condition that the subjects treated retain a limited and concrete character, and are not drowned in broader problems that the President would wish to see settled as a whole.

“It would be regrettable, in my opinion, if an action to which the President intends to give a character parallel to ours compromised the progress we have laboriously accomplished during the past months. This leads me to ask whether it would not be wiser for the President to refrain from any gesture until we have been able to measure the new progress we may be able to achieve in the discussion of the problems we have approached.” (Letter from Prime Minister Chamberlain to President Roosevelt, 14 January 1938, 740.00/264 A. Confidential file, MS. Department of State.) In reality, Chamberlain’s desire is to succeed in settling the problems of Europe by means of a four-power conference — Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy — excluding both the U.S.S.R. and the United States.

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2. Roosevelt’s declaration to J. Cudahy, United States minister in Dublin (Letters, p. 766). To Chamberlain, Roosevelt will reply in a tone that poorly conceals his vexation: “Taking into account the opinions and considerations advanced by the Prime Minister, I willingly renounce making any further proposal until His Majesty’s Government has been able to see what progress it can make in the negotiations it envisages. I hope that it will be good enough to keep me informed of the developments that its direct negotiations with Germany and Italy may take...” (President Roosevelt to Prime Minister Chamberlain, Washington, 17 January 1938, 740.00/264 B. Confidential file, MS. Department of State.)

[[PDF page 335]]

Not that the Americans feel the slightest sympathy for the Axis Powers. On the contrary. Walter Lippmann’s editorials, Cardinal Mundelein’s homilies, M. La Guardia’s speeches, the press campaigns demanding the boycott of German products, the demonstrations of New York dockworkers booing the passengers of the Bremen on their arrival, and the combined agitation of Zionist and anti-fascist circles all help to maintain an atmosphere of cold war, especially in the eastern part of the United States. But however strong and well-orchestrated their propaganda may be, it does not succeed in breaking the wave of isolationism sweeping over America, whose most listened-to leaders are Colonel Lindbergh, General Pershing, head of the American Legion, Senator Borah, and former President Hoover.

Knowing that the average American has no desire to be drawn into adventures, and wishing to set

barriers before the initiatives of the White House, Congress successively passed four “neutrality laws.” The first, proposed by Senator Pittman when

1. In 1937, 62 percent of Americans questioned on this subject thought that the United States should keep out of a conflict. To the question: “If England and France went to war against Germany and Italy, with which side would your sympathies lie?” asked by the New York Times on 27 July 1938, 65 percent of readers answered “England and France”; 3 percent, “Italy and Germany”; 32 percent, “no opinion.” To the question: “Could the United States keep out of a conflict between the European democracies and the Axis Powers?” 54 percent replied “that the U.S.A. could remain neutral”; 46 percent, “that they would be drawn into the war.” Although these figures should be accepted only with some caution, they seem to reflect fairly well American opinion at that time.

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2. The Archbishop of Chicago. “One may wonder how an intelligent people of 60 million inhabitants accepts bowing under the rod of a miserable Austrian tramp and his acolytes like Göring and Goebbels, who dictate each of their movements.” (Declaration of Cardinal Mundelein at a clergy meeting in Chicago, 18 May 1937.)

4. On this occasion, the New York Dockers’ Union published a leaflet declaring: “The Communist Party invites all individuals and all anti-fascist organizations to group together for the defense of the Catholics of Germany. All those who are anti-communists want fascism. Draw the lesson from events. Flood the piers with anti-fascist workers!” (Department of State, Press Release.)

5. To such a point that the United States Ambassador in Berlin thought it necessary to warn Beneš personally “not to let himself be deceived by the anti-German sentiment prevailing in America, especially on the Atlantic coast, where the press controlled by the Jews has great influence.” (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1938, I, p. 540.)

6. Charles Lindbergh and Herbert Hoover were successively received by Hitler at Berchtesgaden. They returned from their trip deeply impressed by the achievements of the Third Reich.

[[PDF page 336]]

the Ethiopian war broke out, was adopted on 31 August 1935. Valid for six months, it obliged the President of the United States to impose an embargo on all arms shipments to belligerents, whoever they might be, as soon as hostilities began. The second (29 February 1936) maintained the obligation to decree an embargo on arms destined for all belligerents, but left the President the right to determine whether a state of war existed or not. It was valid until 1 May 1937. The third (8 January 1937) had only a limited purpose: to prevent the shipment of arms to Spain. But even before the second neutrality law had expired, Congress voted a fourth, on 3 March 1937. This one differed from the preceding laws in that it was stricter and permanent in character. Not only did it oblige the President, in the event of war, to impose an embargo on arms destined for belligerent countries, but it contained a clause known as cash and carry, by virtue of which no American merchandise destined for countries at war could be carried on American ships. In addition, the purchasing states could be required to pay cash.

This wall of prohibitions singularly limits Roosevelt’s powers and removes much weight from his declarations. No doubt he may storm, fulminate, threaten, and intimidate in the name of the enormous

industrial and financial potential of the United States. No doubt he may repeat that “if a world conflagration broke out somewhere, the day would inevitably come when America would be drawn into it.” He may even defy the isolationists by promising

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1. “Certainly, President Roosevelt was not an enthusiastic partisan of the proposed neutrality law,” writes Georges Bonnet, “but he observed to me that the amendments already voted had diminished the scope of the text. ‘The delivery of raw materials necessary for manufacturing war weapons is not forbidden,’ he told me. ‘It is only necessary that the belligerents pay for them in cash and take delivery on the spot. This provision is entirely to the advantage of England and France, for it in fact excludes Italy and Germany, which are not masters of the seas. There remains the delivery of war material itself. It is indeed prohibited. But that is a text which will be repealed a few months after the first acts of hostility.’ I thanked the President for this promise. But I insisted, telling him that this word “neutrality” was more dangerous for us than the law itself, and that it was an encouragement to the dictatorships.” (La Défense de la Paix, 1936–1940, I, p. 14.)

2. The application of this last provision is, however, left to the President’s judgment. “Such was the legislation,” writes J.-B. Duroselle, “which deprived the executive power of almost all possibilities of helping a nation victim of aggression.” (Histoire diplomatique de 1919 à nos jours, p. 365 ff.)

[[PDF page 337]]

to help Canada if it were the victim of aggression. But he cannot go farther and pass from words to acts without encroaching on the rights that Congress has jealously reserved for itself. At this period of her history, America is still a chained giant.

This shows how mistaken are those who picture the United States as a formidable arsenal, stuffed with guns and aircraft ready to rush toward the democracies on the day when they declare war on the dictatorships. The opposite is true. America, which did not intervene in 1937, will intervene neither in 1938 nor in 1939. She will look on without flinching at the invasion of Holland, Belgium, and France, and will emerge from her reserve only in 1941, when she herself has been attacked by Japan.

That is why Georges Bonnet, who knows well the state of mind prevailing in the White House, having for a time been ambassador in Washington, has few illusions. He knows that in case of war, America will be able to bring France no military help. “Many people,” he writes, “imagined that America could play a role in the Czechoslovak crisis. I was very close to M. Bullitt — I still am, moreover — and he had never concealed from me his view of American action.” But despite the legal provisions that paralyze them, the United States occupies too great a place in world affairs to be neglected.

To mark this clearly, Bonnet decides to inaugurate with Bullitt, on 4 September 1938, the monument erected in the Gironde, at Pointe de Grave, to the memory of the American soldiers who died on the French front in 1918.

On 29 August, M. Bullitt comes to read him his proposed address.

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1. Speech delivered at Kingston (Ontario) on 18 August 1938. Lord Halifax will thank him for it. But it

is only a symbolic gesture. The isolationists will accept it because they will see in it “a simple application of the Monroe Doctrine.”

3. From November 1936 to 28 June 1937, the date on which he returned to France to become Minister of Finance in the Chautemps Cabinet.

4. “I knew very exactly,” writes Georges Bonnet, “that the United States could not, in case of war, bring us military aid. But I thought that, by publicly affirming their sympathy for the democracies, they could make Hitler hesitate to unleash the aggression he was premeditating.” (Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 201.)

5. Annoyed by the Scottish-shower treatment to which the State Department subjected its ambassadors, Bullitt once said to one of his French friends, speaking of the United States: “Do not expect too much from this plesiosaur with a banana brain.”

[[PDF page 338]]

M. Bonnet finds it far too colorless. To give it more force, he asks the ambassador to include at least the words he had spoken a year earlier in the presence of Léon Blum: “We hope to remain out of war, but we know well that it is always possible that a nation may be mad enough to draw us into it.” Bullitt replies that he must first refer the matter to the President of the United States. For all reply, the State Department gives him a formal refusal.

Bonnet insists with the ambassador. After an acrimonious exchange of telegrams with Washington, Bullitt finally receives, forty-eight hours before the ceremony, permission to insert in his speech a formula somewhat attenuated in comparison with the one he had used before Blum. “As I said on 22 January 1937,” he declares, “if a conflict broke out in Europe, no one could declare, or predict whether, yes or no, the United States would be drawn into such a war. Let people remember what happened in 1914!”

This is not very compromising. Yet Bonnet rejoices over it, for he hopes that this allusion to the First World War will give the German leaders something to think about.

But the next day the French press makes much of this phrase and asserts “that in case of conflict, the United States would automatically find itself alongside France.” Congress is at once stirred, and the isolationist press reacts with such vigor that Roosevelt sees himself forced publicly to disavow his ambassador. At his press conference of 9 September, he states without ambiguity: “Bullitt’s speech in no way constitutes a moral commitment on the part of the United States toward the democracies. It is not our intention to advocate the creation of ideological blocs. To include the United States in a France–Great Britain front against Hitler is a one-hundred-percent false interpretation by political columnists.”

These words cause a sensation. As a result, the Quai d'Orsay knows where it stands

1. There is no official text of this declaration. But the terms in which it was reported by all the American newspapers coincide exactly. R. de Roussy de Sales, who was in America at the time, thinks that Roosevelt acted under the effect of a nervous depression due to the illness of his eldest son.

(L'Évolution de l'Amérique pendant la crise européenne, L'Europe nouvelle, 29 October 1938, supplement.) But the attitude of the President of the United States will be similar on other occasions.

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2. By disavowing Bullitt, Roosevelt at the same time contradicts his “Quarantine Speech.” (See vol. IV, p. 76.)

[[PDF page 339]]

on the American attitude; so does the Wilhelmstrasse, which receives this declaration with the satisfaction one may imagine. But this is not all.

A week later, Bullitt comes to inform Bonnet that if war breaks out, the neutrality law will immediately come into force. Roosevelt will be obliged to decree, on the very day, the embargo on arms. All deliveries will be suspended. France will no longer even be able to receive the 1,200 aircraft she has ordered from American industry to remedy the weakness of her aviation. Thus, more than ever, France is reduced to herself. How is this state of things to be reconciled with the words spoken by Paul Reynaud from the rostrum of the Chamber, during the debate on National Defense held there from 26 to 28 February 1938:

“Is France weak? Is France alone?” asked the future President of the Council. “No, gentlemen, that is not true! France is not alone. Whatever the fluctuations of policy, do you believe that Poland is unaware that, if France were crushed, she would cease to live? Would you count for nothing this fine Czechoslovak army, whose war material is powerful? Finally, gentlemen, behind the gigantic British rearmament, there is another rearmament which, believe me, is a counsel of wisdom for the dictatorships: it is the colossal rearmament of the United States of America.

“Thus, strong in herself, France is strong through her friendships and through her alliances. I beg you, gentlemen, let us know the strength of France!”

Here too, there is a long way from words to realities, as this disillusioned remark by Georges Bonnet shows: “To the questions we had asked in the various capitals, the answers were all equally discouraging

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1. A first order for 500 aircraft was placed on 5 May 1938; a second, for 700 aircraft, on the 27th of the same month.

2. “Poland belongs to no ideological bloc on the continent,” Colonel Beck will declare to Ward Price on 21 March 1938, that is, less than a month later. “We are neither theorists nor anti-theorists: we are realists. We want to live in peace with all our neighbors and we think we have found the best way to achieve it.” Boris Celovsky adds: “Poland had very rapidly recognized the Italian Empire and was ostentatiously distancing itself from the system to which it owed its existence.” (Das Münchener Abkommen, pp. 233–234.)

3. The monthly production of American aircraft at this time is 150 machines, that is, 3.5 times less than that of Germany. (The Aircraft Yearbook for 1945, New York, p. 400.)

[[PDF page 340]]

ones. Beck had replied, in the name of Poland: ‘We shall fight only against the Czechs.’ M. Van Zeeland, in the name of Belgium: ‘If you cross our frontier, you will run into us.’ Chamberlain, in the name of Great Britain: ‘I can guarantee to help France only if she is attacked. And besides, I have almost nothing to offer her.’ To this Roosevelt adds, in the name of the United States: ‘In case of war, I shall be able to send you neither one man nor one sou!’”

Then, on whom can one rely? On the U.S.S.R.?

In 1924, when Moscow supported the right of peoples to self-determination because it saw in it a means of dislocating the bourgeois states, the Fifth Congress of the Communist International, meeting in the Kremlin from 17 June to 8 July, voted the following resolutions:

1. The Congress notes that there is no Czechoslovak nation. The Czechoslovak state comprises, besides the Czech nationality, Slovaks, Germans, Hungarians, Ukrainians, and Poles;

2. The Congress considers it necessary that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, as regards these national minorities, proclaim and put into practice the right of peoples to self-determination, up to and including the right to separate;

3. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia must support the struggle of the Slovaks for their independence;

4. The Congress considers it indispensable to strengthen Communist activity among the Hungarians of the regions annexed by Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia.

Placed in the vanguard of revisionism, the U.S.S.R. therefore had no reason to support the Government of Prague — on the contrary.

But since then, much water has flowed under the bridges.

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3. Cf. Georges Bonnet, Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 207. “You may count on us for everything except troops and loans.” (Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 841.)

[[PDF page 341]]

The crushing of the Communist revolutions in Hungary, Austria, Bavaria, and Germany, and the victorious rise of the fascisms in Rome and Berlin, led the U.S.S.R. to modify its position. From revisionist, it became champion of the status quo. Since the signing of the Czecho-Soviet Pact of Assistance of 16 May 1936, it no longer admits that the Czechoslovak state, suddenly promoted to the role of “aircraft carrier of the democracies” and “bridgehead of Marxism,” may be touched. In other words, for it the question is no longer to use the minorities to dislocate Czechoslovakia, but to use

Czechoslovakia to dislocate Europe.

From 1934 to 1938, the U.S.S.R. endeavored to increase its influence over the Western countries. In the aftermath of the Anschluss, it judged the moment had come to form a great anti-German front with France and England. Many reasons pushed it to this, foremost among which was the continuous progress of Hitlerian power, which threatens its existence and risks compromising the victory of the proletarian revolution. But there is another, no less strong, although it is never openly mentioned: the fear of seeing the capitalist regimes ally themselves with the Reich to form a common front against Bolshevism. This eventuality is a veritable obsession for the Kremlin leaders. It seems to them all the more likely because fascism is, in their eyes, only “the most condensed form of capitalism,” and because collusion between Nazis and nationalist bourgeois seems to them in the order of things. Hence their invincible mistrust of the European states and their efforts to prevent any rapprochement among them.

The first to open the diplomatic offensive is Maxim

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1. The historian who approaches this aspect of contemporary policy must do so only with the most extreme circumspection. The Russians have devoted numerous works to the Munich Conference. But these never present anything other than the official theses, those that the Kremlin leaders judged it good to allow to appear. Their plans of world conquest are never mentioned in them. “To consider these texts as irrefutable sources and to interpret Soviet policy in their light is not to do the work of a historian,” writes Boris Celovsky. “The diplomatic archives of the Kremlin have not been published and so long as they are not, we shall not know the exact content of the instructions sent by the Russian Government to its ambassadors. But one can remedy this gap by referring to the reports of foreign ambassadors in Moscow and by comparing the declarations of the principal personalities of the regime with the fundamental theses of Marxism-Leninism.” (Cf. Das Münchener Abkommen, p. 311.)

Litvinov, the Soviet People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs. On 15 and 17 March 1938 — that is, forty-eight hours after the entry of German troops into Vienna — he takes advantage of a reception given at the Kremlin in honor of the Iranian ambassador to gather the correspondents of the foreign press accredited in Moscow and to give them the following speech:

“For four years the Soviet Union has been working for the maintenance of peace within the framework of collective security, four years during which it has never ceased to denounce the dangers of a passive attitude toward aggressors. The case of Austria shows that our warnings, justified as they were, were not heeded. When, then, will people decide to check the dictatorships? Negotiating with Hitler is absolutely useless, for his ambitions are insatiable. Yesterday it was Austria; tomorrow it will be Czechoslovakia. These repeated aggressions will end by unleashing a new world conflict. The Soviet Union, for its part, is prepared to examine with the other Powers, either within the framework of the League of Nations or outside it, all measures capable of ensuring the safeguarding of peace.”

The journalists present — and notably M. Choczynski, Moscow correspondent of the Polish agency PAT — then put three questions to M. Litvinov:

1. If Czechoslovakia were attacked by Germany and France came to her aid, would the U.S.S.R. do likewise?

2. If so, what would be the nature of the aid Russia would bring her?

3. Would this aid require the creation of a corridor through the territories of Poland and Romania?

“To your first question,” replies Litvinov, “I answer yes, without hesitation. But if France failed in her commitments, Russia would recover her freedom of action and would herself apply a sauve-qui-peut policy. As for the nature of our aid, it must be carefully

personalities of the regime with the fundamental theses of Marxism-Leninism.” (Cf. Das Münchener Abkommen, p. 311.)

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1. The complete text of this address will be found in Litvinov, Against Aggression, p. 114 ff. See also Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1, p. 90; Foreign Relations of the United States, 1938, I, p. 465; Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, pp. 92, 96, 127.

[[PDF page 343]]

discussed. One always finds a road when one wants to.”

Despite their apparent banality, these answers by the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs are full of interest. They confirm that the U.S.S.R. subordinates its intervention to France’s entry into the war. As for the rest, Litvinov prefers not to speak of it too much, for he foresees that the creation of access corridors through Poland and Romania will run into the veto of Warsaw and Bucharest.

At the very hour when Litvinov is holding his press conference at the Kremlin — which suggests a prior agreement — Léon Blum declares in the Chamber of Deputies:

“In case of a European conflict, the U.S.S.R. will certainly find itself on the side of France.”

In London, Churchill greets Litvinov’s declarations as an event of the highest importance, the starting point of an Anglo-Franco-Russian “Grand Alliance,” alone capable of checking Hitler’s ambitions. He goes to see Chamberlain to make him understand that the Kremlin’s overtures represent “an unhoped-for chance, a support that must not be allowed to escape at any price.”

“I have never been a partisan of Communism,” he declares, “but I would be ready to conclude a pact with the devil in order to bring Hitler down!”

Encouraged by these remarks, Litvinov decides to transform his suggestions into official offers, which he transmits in the form of diplomatic notes to the Quai d'Orsay and Downing Street.

But Churchill is in opposition; Blum will leave power in about two weeks (8 April 1938); Chamberlain, for his part, is of a different opinion. If he strives to keep America away from European affairs, it is not

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2. To the question put by M. von Tippelskirch, correspondent of the D.N.B.: “Will the U.S.S.R. intervene if France does not?” Litvinov replies in the negative. Russia does not want at any price to commit herself first, so much does she fear not being followed by the Western countries. On 5 September, M. Fierlinger, Czechoslovak minister in Moscow, will say to M. Coulondre, French ambassador: “They do not believe in the Kremlin that France and England are ready to make war for Czechoslovakia and, under these conditions, they judge it preferable to remain on reserve. There is here a dangerous misunderstanding that must be dissipated quickly.” (Coulondre, De Staline à Hitler, Souvenirs de deux ambassades 1936–1939, p. 157.)

4. Winston Churchill, Memoirs, The Gathering Storm, p. 245 ff. Chamberlain alludes to this démarche by Churchill in a letter to his sister. (See above, p. 305.)

[[PDF page 344]]

in order to let the U.S.S.R., which he considers a semi-Asiatic Power, intrude there.

“I see myself obliged to decline the Soviet proposal,” he declares on 24 March in the House of Commons, “for His Majesty’s Government considers that the meeting in conference of a certain number of Powers would have as its only effect to increase international tension. I am no less favorable than others to a conference of all the European states, but I consider that the moment to convene it has not yet come.”

After the pure and simple rejection of the Russian proposals by the Government of the United Kingdom and the receipt of the English note of 22 March 1938, the French Government can adopt only a reserved attitude. Washington likewise rejects Litvinov’s offers.

In Moscow, these refusals are attributed to a very precise ulterior motive. For Stalin the game of the Western Powers is clear. He has always suspected the capitalist countries of wanting to isolate the U.S.S.R. Now he is sure of it. Warned as early as 23 March, by his secret agents, of the negative tenor of the English reply, Litvinov reacts brutally. He declares to M. Davies, Ambassador of the United States:

“Very well! Germany will soon swallow up the whole continent, but the Soviet Union will arrange matters so as to suffer no damage from it. France has no confidence in the U.S.S.R.? So be it! The U.S.S.R., for its part, has no confidence in France.”

M. Davies is so impressed by this language that he immediately informs his government of it, in a report in which he

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Hansard, vol. 333, p. 1406. The same day, Lord Halifax hands a note of identical tenor to M. Maisky, Soviet ambassador in London. (Documents on British Foreign Policy, I, 116.)

4. Since England rejected the Russian proposals, France has no advantage in aligning herself with Moscow’s theses, for she risks thereby losing England’s support.

5. Roosevelt, who has already suggested the meeting of a conference, cannot rally to a conference project proposed by someone else.

6. Potemkin, Histoire de la Diplomatie, III, part 2, p. 280 ff.; A. Nekritsch, Dvojnaja igra pravitelstva Chamberlaina i jejo proval, Voprosy istorii, 1950, booklet 2, pp. 46–73. “We do not want to be isolated in international affairs!” cries M. Trojanovsky at the inauguration of the Russo-American Chamber of Commerce in New York, thus expressing the anxiety of Soviet ruling circles. (Documents on International Affairs, 1938, I, p. 315.)

7. Note from Ambassador Davies to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, 26 March 1938; Davies, Als U.S. Botschafter in Moskau, Zurich, 1943, p. 224.

[[PDF page 345]]

evokes the possibility of a German-Russian agreement. When Roosevelt reads it, he bursts out laughing and wonders whether Davies has lost his head.

On 28 and 29 April, Daladier and Bonnet go to London, where they reach agreement with Chamberlain on another policy: the one which consists — as we have already seen — in exerting direct pressure on Prague to bring it to yield on the Sudeten problem, while multiplying warnings to Germany in order to dissuade her from resorting to force.

In Russian eyes, this manner of acting can lead only to a Four-Power negotiation among France, England, Germany, and Italy, from which they will be excluded. If this eventuality comes to pass, they will find themselves not only isolated, but caught as in pincers between a hostile Europe and an enemy Japan. This danger frightens them to such a point that they are resolved to do everything possible to avoid it.

The rejection of the Russian offers also worries Beneš, who charges his trusted man, M. Arnost Heidrich, to go to Sinaia, in Romania, to sound out King Carol’s intentions on the possibilities of allowing Russian troops to pass through his territory (1 May).

“My country will never tolerate the passage of Russian troops,” King Carol replies. “The railway line is single-track. The transport of a single division would take more than eight days. Moreover, under pretext of ensuring the protection of their bases, the Russians will demand the occupation of large portions of Romania. No one knows when they will evacuate them. However, although Romania cannot expressly authorize the overflight of Soviet aircraft, she will close her eyes if they cross her airspace at high altitude.”

Beneš informs Litvinov of this conversation, in

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. “Even if it may seem premature,” writes Davies, “such an eventuality is within the realm of possible things.” (Op. cit., p. 229 ff.)

3. Work on doubling the line through Bessarabia was suspended in the spring of 1938.

4. General Gamelin, M. Kennan, and M. Comnène were still more pessimistic. (See above, p. 294, note 1.)

5. “When one looks at what is happening at present,” the Times will write in its supplement of 26 April 1947, “one is forced to recognize that the Romanian Government was not wrong.”

[[PDF page 346]]

which he sees a possible opening. But the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs proves very punctilious. Russia does things properly or does not do them: she will undertake nothing without a regular authorization, for she does not want to see herself denounced as an aggressor state by the Western countries. It is also necessary that this authorization extend to land forces, for the overflight of a few aircraft would serve no purpose.

A few days later (9 May 1938), Georges Bonnet goes to Geneva to attend the meeting of the Council of the League of Nations. There he meets Litvinov and asks him what he intends to do.

“If Czechoslovakia is attacked by Germany,” he says to him, “France will respect her commitments by lending her support. But what will the U.S.S.R. do? It is indispensable for us to know in advance.”

“If France fulfills her obligations, the Soviet Union will also fulfill hers,” replies Litvinov once more. “But on one condition: that Romania or Poland permit
it to have its troops and aircraft cross or fly over their territory. The U.S.S.R. will not intervene without the explicit consent of one or the other of these two countries, for she does not care to find herself at war with them. Since the French Government has treaties with Romania and Poland, let it take the necessary steps to obtain these authorizations.”

As for convincing Poland, Bonnet knows that it is lost effort. Beck, Rydz-Śmigły, and Łukasiewicz have repeated it to him often enough. So long as the apple of discord of Teschen remains, Prague and Warsaw will never come to terms. But Romania? Will she not show herself more understanding than her neighbor? Alas! Since 1920, the date on which Romania annexed Bessarabia, Bucharest and Moscow have been at daggers drawn. When Georges Bonnet approaches the question with M. Comnène, he encounters a categorical non possumus.

“No Romanian government,” he replies to him, “could accept the passage of Russian troops over its territory. Their entry would provoke that of the Germans and Romania

[[PDF page 347]]

would immediately become a vast battlefield.”

For Bonnet, this position amounts to a definitive refusal. It surprises him all the less because he knows that it corresponds to the deep feeling of Romanian opinion. However — a troubling fact — Litvinov, who meets M. Comnène every day at the Palais des Nations, carefully refrains from putting the question to him.

Can it be that he is less intent than he claims on obtaining the right of passage? This hypothesis seems confirmed by the interview Litvinov has two days later (11 May) with M. Heidrich, Beneš's trusted man. The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs paints the situation for him in the darkest colors:

"No doubt can remain as to Hitler's aggressive intentions," he tells him, "but we are not blind! The West would like to use Hitler to overthrow Stalin, and use Stalin to overthrow Hitler. Know that Moscow has learned the lesson of the First World War. While Russia was sacrificing millions of young men, the Western Powers remained with weapons grounded (!). This time, it will be the Russians who will look on as spectators at the conflict that will set Germany against the Western Powers. She will intervene only when she judges that the moment has come to impose a just and lasting peace on all the belligerents."

"But then, you will bring no assistance to Czechoslovakia?" Heidrich asks him in terror.

"The U.S.S.R. is not yet altogether ready," replies Litvinov with an evasive gesture. "Moreover, the negative replies of Poland and Romania make it impossible for her to come to Czechoslovakia's aid."

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2. On 28 February 1938, the Romanian Parliament voted an amendment to the Constitution of 1923, article 91 of which specifies: "No foreign armed troop may be admitted to the service of the State and may enter or pass over the territory of Romania except by virtue of a law."

3. "He was to remain fifteen days in Geneva opposite Comnène without once raising this question with him. That is what the latter emphasized in his own account." (Georges Bonnet, Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 204.)

4. In speaking thus, Litvinov is only paraphrasing the speech delivered by Stalin on 19 January 1925 before the Central Committee of the Communist Party, which perfectly illustrates his policy of 1938: "If war begins, we shall not fold our arms. We shall have to intervene, but to intervene last. And we shall intervene in order to throw the decisive weight into the balance, the weight that could carry the day." (J. V. Stalin, Works, vol. VII, Moscow, 1947.)

[[PDF page 348]]

The next day, Bonnet sees Litvinov again and puts the same question to him once more:

"What will you do in the event of aggression against Czechoslovakia?"

Litvinov merely repeats what he has already affirmed many times:

"We shall intervene, if France also intervenes. However, the only possible solution is for us to pass through Poland or Romania. As the ally of these countries, it is for France to obtain authorization from them. Besides, it would be useful to proceed to conversations between our two General Staffs."

The prospect of these conversations does not delight Bonnet in the least, for he fears that military support from the Soviets might provoke an offensive return of the Popular Front. Returning to Paris on

20 May, he nevertheless opens the matter to Daladier. The President of the Council shows himself favorable to the Soviet suggestion. Consequently, Bonnet charges M. Coulondre, French ambassador in Moscow, to let the Kremlin leaders know that Paris is prepared to begin the talks. But then a second troubling fact occurs: Litvinov arranges to torpedo the military conversations he himself proposed.

From their first interview, instead of treating the problem posed by a German aggression against Czechoslovakia, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs evokes the case in which Czechoslovakia would be attacked by Poland. In speaking thus, he reveals his hand for the first time. Behind the Czech affair, Russian claims with respect to Warsaw suddenly take shape. Moscow wants to take revenge for the Treaty of Riga.

As Coulondre pretends not to understand, Litvinov insists:

"What would France, allied to Poland, do," he asks,

[Footnote continuation retained from OCR:] if the U.S.S.R. had not given assistance to Czechoslovakia in 1938, Stalin will reply by invoking the same argument: "We needed to gain time. Even in 1941, the Soviet Army showed itself very poorly equipped and cut a very poor figure." (Cited by Georges Bonnet, Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 229.)

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Moreover, the British General Staff and General Weygand's entourage show themselves very skeptical as to the offensive value of the Red Army. (See vol. IV, p. 251, note 2.)

"in the event that the latter attacked Czechoslovakia and Russia, acting by virtue of Article 2 of the Russo-Czech pact of assistance, attacked Poland in turn?"

Surprised by this question, the French ambassador asks to consult Paris. Questioned, the Quai d'Orsay replies by invoking the clauses of the Czecho-Soviet pact:

"The U.S.S.R. is bound to fulfill its obligations toward Prague only if France fulfills hers."

"Quite right, quite right!" repeats Litvinov with a smile. "But there is also another hypothesis, of which you do not speak. What would happen if the Soviets intervened [against Warsaw] for one reason or another? Would France move?"

This allusion to a possible Russo-Polish conflict escapes Coulondre, whose whole attention is absorbed by the Czech problem. He transmits the question again to Paris.

Bonnet realizes well enough that the Franco-Polish alliance has lost much of its value. But from there to denouncing it to please the Soviets, there is a step he is not disposed to take. He asks M. Coulondre to make Litvinov understand this. Litvinov sees in this a ready-made opportunity to save himself from difficulty. Now that he knows what he wanted to know, he loses interest in the rest and arranges for the conversations between General Staffs to be postponed sine die.

This game of hide-and-seek, in which each pushes the other forward and seeks to discern his interlocutor's ulterior motives without revealing his own, does little to advance matters. By dint of going in circles, the negotiation returns to its starting point. The solution of the German-Czech problem is neither in Washington, nor in Moscow, nor in Paris: it is in London.

Of this Chamberlain, for his part, had never had any doubt.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Colonel Beck had already declared to him: "The Franco-Polish Pact has lost all significance, because of the Franco-Soviet Pact and the German-Polish Non-Aggression Treaty." (See above, p. 314.)

[[PDF page 350]]

XVII
LORD RUNCIMAN'S MISSION TO PRAGUE
(3 August–10 September 1938)

"We are often told," Chamberlain said in the speech he delivered at Scarborough on 8 April 1938, "that if we adopted a bolder line of conduct, if we fixed from now on, in a clear and precise way, the circumstances in which we would or would not go to war, we would give the world such a warning that, thanks to it, war would be avoided. But to act thus would be to make a wager, and not a wager whose stake would be money, but the lives of men, women, and children of our race and our blood. I am not disposed to make a wager of that kind and, although the harsh necessity of war may present itself to us in the future as it has already presented itself in the past, I shall give my consent to it only on the day when I have acquired the conviction that there exists no other means of preserving our freedom."

This love of peace, whose sincerity cannot be doubted, is one of the most touching traits of Neville Chamberlain's character. In this terrible diplomatic imbroglio, in which most of the protagonists often give the impression of letting themselves be guided only by their selfish interests, he seems to be the only one never to lose sight of the destructions and bereavements that a new world conflagration would entail. For him, the maintenance of peace is too precious a good not to deserve some sacrifices. And that, whatever may be said of it, stands to his credit, even

[[PDF page 351]]

though his detractors have seen in it a mixture of inexperience and naïveté.

Now, since the month of April, things have made no progress. The Franco-Polish, Franco-Romanian, and Franco-Russian conversations have led to dead ends. The negotiations between Czechs and Sudetens are at a standstill. By contrast, each passing day brings closer the fatal date after which a war will no longer be avoidable. When the Nuremberg Congress has taken place, when the harvest has been brought in, when the western fortifications are more or less finished, and when the recruits of the class of 1938 have completed their training, all the conditions required for an intervention by the Wehrmacht will have been assembled. The British Prime Minister consequently considers that the crisis will reach

its culminating point around 1 October — without yet knowing that Hitler has fixed that same date for the beginning of hostilities. It is therefore indispensable to find, by then, a definitive solution to the Sudeten problem.

As early as mid-June, Chamberlain and Halifax judged that the time had come to send to Prague a person capable of serving as arbiter between Beneš and Henlein, and of settling the dispute that opposed them. But will the Czech Government accept this procedure?

Meanwhile (17 July), Captain Wiedemann, the Führer's aide-de-camp, arrives in London. His visit, made

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Chamberlain is much less naïve than has been claimed, and one does not need to be weak-headed to prefer peace to war. Having taken the exact measure of England's weakness, he tells himself that an arrangement with Hitler may avert a conflict. If it does not avert it, it will at least have the merit of securing for his country a respite that will allow it to perfect its rearmament.

2. Or does he already know it? In his book on Mussolini, Ray MacGregor-Hastie asserts that the directives given by Hitler to Keitel on 30 May (see above, p. 229) were perfectly known to the English secret services, which would explain many things... (Le Jour du Lion, p. 258.)

3. On 18 June, Halifax had opened the matter for the first time to Newton. "Since nothing can be expected from the continuation of negotiations between Prague and the S.d.P., it would be appropriate to sound out the ground to learn how the sending of an independent British expert would be received." Newton replied "that it would be better to wait until the moment when the Czecho-Sudeten negotiations were actually broken off." Halifax agreed with this view, but reluctantly, for he believes that on the day when matters have reached that point, it will be too late to intervene.

4. The invitation addressed to Wiedemann was made by Halifax at the urging of Princess Hohenlohe, secretary of Lord Rothermere, of Lady Astor, and of Lord Ribblesdale, who favored an Anglo-German rapprochement. The interview, in principle, was to remain secret. But the press got wind of it, owing to the indiscretion of a member of the Foreign Office. The London newspapers published the news, giving it the importance of a world event.

without Ribbentrop's knowledge, has the purpose of preparing a visit by Göring. Lord Halifax receives him the very next day at his private residence, in the presence of Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office. Very quickly, the problem of Göring's visit recedes into the background and the two interlocutors come to speak of a much more burning subject: the Czechoslovak question.

"I am the man who knows Hitler best, and has known him longest," remarks Wiedemann, "since I had him under my orders as a corporal during the First World War. You will obtain nothing from him by pressure or threats. They only harden him and make him intractable. Sir Nevile Henderson's warnings on 21 May last, when Prague spread the rumor that we had mobilized, exasperated him. Do not hope either to separate Italy from the Reich: you are wasting your time. Hitler considers that England makes

no effort to understand Germany's situation. Yet he is favorable to an Anglo-German understanding, but only when the problems of Central Europe have been settled. In one way or another, he is resolved to make an end of the Sudeten problem. He has shown great patience so far. But do not wait too long, for by pulling too hard on the rope, it will finally break..."

"Would it not be possible," asks Halifax, "to obtain from Germany at least a declaration by which she would undertake not to resort to force?"

"I am not authorized to make a declaration of that kind," replies Wiedemann, "and I doubt that one could be obtained, at least in the present situation."

"It could serve as a preamble to Göring's arrival..."

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Göring would like to return to Halifax the visit the latter had made to him some time earlier at Karinhall. He considers that his coming to London would have a beneficial effect on Anglo-German relations and would pave the way to an agreement between the two countries.

3. Wiedemann alludes to the dealings pursued between Rome and London concerning the entry into force of the agreement of 16 April 1938.

4. Before Wiedemann's departure for London, Hitler specified exactly what he was to say to Halifax. The aide-de-camp merely repeats his leader's words. (Wiedemann, Private Papers, MS. Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Box 669–604; also: Der Mann der Feldherr werden wollte, p. 159. The two versions supplied by Wiedemann correspond.)

5. In reality neither Halifax nor Hitler considers it "current."

[[PDF page 353]]

"Later, I do not say no, but not at present..."

"In any case," Halifax assures Wiedemann as he takes leave of him, "tell your Führer that I hope to witness, before I die, the realization of what is the goal of all my efforts: to see Hitler received by the King of England and acclaimed by the London crowd from the balcony of Buckingham Palace."

When Wiedemann returns to Berchtesgaden to report to Hitler on the results of his mission, the Führer is walking in his park with Unity Mitford and makes him wait two hours. After that, he grants him only five minutes of interview, so little does the affair interest him. Even Lord Halifax's final phrase leaves him indifferent. He is already convinced that England is not in a position to intervene and that he is master of the situation.

Wiedemann's trip, whose importance was disproportionately exaggerated by the London press, would therefore not deserve attention if it had not had consequences no one could foresee. The Führer's aide-de-camp spoke with Halifax on the afternoon of 18 July. Now, on the same day, at 10 p.m., Halifax gets in touch with M. Basil Newton, British minister in Czechoslovakia, to ask him to inform Beneš that the British Government intends to send Lord Runciman to Prague as mediator. Wiedemann's visit was not

— as has long been believed — the origin of this mission. But it contributed to hastening its departure.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Wiedemann, report of mission to the Reich Chancellor. “It is often said,” he will later write, “that the Führer constantly made overtures to England, but that England always gave him the cold shoulder. This is not exact. As early as the spring of 1938, the English let us understand: ‘Bombs on Prague would mean war. Tactic toward the Czechs: no gunshots; strangle.’” (Private Papers, Box 604.)

2. Unity Mitford is the sister of Diana Guinness, wife of Sir Oswald Mosley. Unity and Diana, who had made Hitler’s acquaintance in Munich, were often invited to Berchtesgaden, where they caused a sensation by their intelligence and beauty.

3. Once certain that his message has been faithfully transmitted, the rest is all the same to him. “As for me,” Wiedemann tells us, “the only thing this intrusion into international politics earned me was Ribbentrop’s hostility. He never forgave me for having made this journey without informing him.”

4. Walter Runciman represented the Liberal Party as a member of the House of Commons from 1899 to 1937; he was Minister of Education from 1908 to 1911, then Minister of Commerce from 1931 to 28 May 1937, the date on which he was elevated to the peerage with the title Viscount Runciman of Doxford. At the end of his mission to Prague, he will be appointed Lord President of the Council, a post he will hold until 3 September 1939.

[[PDF page 354]]

“You will explain to President Beneš,” Halifax says to Newton, “that you come to see him privately to speak with him about this affair and you will strongly press him to declare himself ready to accept our proposal... You will add that, if it appeared to His Majesty’s Government that a rupture [in the negotiations with the S.d.P.] must follow, with all the dangers that such a rupture would entail for European peace, His Majesty’s Government could not refrain from making its proposal public, at the same time as the reply that had been made to it... The ideal way of proceeding would be for the Czechoslovak Government and the Sudeten leaders to publish a joint communiqué, saying that they have asked His Majesty’s Government to designate a qualified person to serve them as arbiter and that they welcome with satisfaction the announcement made by His Majesty’s Government, namely that, following up on their request, it has chosen Lord Runciman to fill this office.”

Beneš turns pale on hearing these words. Not content with imposing on him an arbiter whom he has in no way solicited, London requires him to pretend that he himself asked for his coming! More still: it asks him to welcome eagerly the appointment of Lord Runciman, to whom those around him attribute pro-German feelings! He reels under the blow, loses countenance, and recovers his wits only at the end of the interview.

“It is impossible!” he replies in a voice strangled by anger. “To entrust to a foreigner the task of settling the Sudeten problem would be to infringe our national sovereignty!”

“Reflect on the terrible responsibilities you would assume by opposing a refusal to the British proposal,” Newton observes.

“I cannot give you an immediate answer,” replies Beneš. “First I must consult the French...”

But Paris, consulted, urgently presses Beneš to accept

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The former president of the Board of Trade greeted with great satisfaction the signing of the Anglo-German naval agreement of 18 June 1936.

the English proposal. The day before, M. de Lacroix had already drawn his attention to the fact that “if serious incidents broke out between Czechs and Sudetens, it would become difficult to convince the French that they must fight for the Czechs.”

These two declarations, coming only a few hours apart, are not, properly speaking, ultimatums; but the will to force Beneš’s hand appears clearly in them. For a man as obstinate and as sure of himself as he is, this is more than a painful surprise: it is the beginning of a moral bombardment that will not cease to intensify over the coming weeks.

Beneš paces his office in long strides, clenching his fists.

“No! No!” he repeats. “I shall never yield to this blackmail. The English threaten to publish my reply? Well then, let them publish it!”

Beneš knows that he can count on the Army’s support. But M. Hodža is of a different opinion. The President of the Council considers that Czechoslovakia cannot afford the luxury of rejecting the English proposal and that his refusal, if made public, would make it lose the support of its Western allies. He explains this at length to the President of the Republic and insists that he have another interview with M. Newton. Beneš finally agrees. He sees the representative of the Foreign Office again and tells him that the British proposal “is not totally unacceptable.”

For his part, M. Hodža lets M. Newton know that he is going to convene the Council of Ministers and that he hopes to obtain from it an affirmative answer. That is indeed what happens. After

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. The Army is irreducibly hostile to any concession. The organ of the Officers’ Corps, the Dustojnické Listy, will publish on 18 August an appeal to its members drafted in these terms: “Nothing must be yielded from the positions we occupy, which allow us to live, work, fight, and defend ourselves!”

3. Despite Soviet support, Czechoslovak policy is oriented toward the Western democracies. Had Beneš not affirmed to Léon Noël on 23 April 1938: “You know it, my policy is pro-Western; I model my attitude on that of France and Great Britain”? (Léon Noël, Une ambassade à Varsovie 1935–1939, p. 200.) M. Hodža points out to him that such a declaration is incompatible with a refusal.

4. The arguments on which M. Hodža bases himself are the following: 1. Lord Runciman’s mediation may not be harmful if it is contained within certain limits; 2. it may allow the English to realize for themselves the impossibility of reaching agreement with the Sudetens.

[[PDF page 356]]

several hours of deliberation, the Czech Cabinet rallies to his point of view.

On 23 July, M. Hodža hands M. Newton a note in which he begins by “thanking the English Government for its solicitude.” He continues by emphasizing the efforts made by Prague to find for the Sudeten problem an honorable solution, one that “satisfies the German minority while taking account of the vital interests, unity, and integrity of the country.” The note ends with these words: “The Czechoslovak Government will welcome with satisfaction any help that may be brought to it with a view to attaining these objectives. Conscious of acting in full agreement with the British and French Governments, it asks His Majesty’s Government, in a friendly manner, to be good enough to designate a person capable of helping it overcome the difficulties that might still arise.”

Three days later (26 July), Chamberlain officially announces to the House of Commons the sending of the Runciman mission to Prague: “The negotiations between Czechs and Sudetens having arrived at an impasse from which nothing seemed able to draw them,” he declares, “His Majesty’s Government wondered whether there did not exist another means of facilitating an agreement between the two parties. In reply to a request addressed to it by the Czechoslovak Government, it has accepted sending to the spot a person possessing the qualifications required to serve as investigator and mediator.”

London has won a serious advantage. Halifax congratulates himself on it. As for Bonnet, he considers that the Sudeten affair takes on, with the Runciman mission, a new aspect.

“Until then,” he writes, “the Government of Prague was master of its decisions: it could make the minorities the concessions it judged suitable. From now on, everything is changed. The Government of Prague is provided with a guardian

1. It is not impossible that Beneš felt some spite over this, for from that moment his relations with M. Hodža take a distinctly unfriendly turn. “A Czech would not have bowed so quickly,” he says to M. Zenkl, the mayor of Prague, alluding to the Slovak origins of the President of the Council.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Such are the “limits” that M. Hodža wants to impose on the mediation. They make the problem practically insoluble.

3. Hansard, vol. 338, cols. 2955–2963. Although it consented to the sending of this mission, the French Government preferred not to associate itself with it. Halifax speaks of Paris’s warm agreement. That is forcing the note somewhat.

[[PDF page 357]]

which it has accepted while thanking the British Government for its solicitude. Certainly, theoretically, the guardian can give only opinions. But these will have considerable scope.”

Yet it is against his will that Beneš has gone to Canossa. Who will believe, despite all the precautions taken to convince international opinion of it, that Runciman is acting as a “neutral and independent” expert, and not as a representative of the British Government? The Czech Government in no way desired his coming. Nor did the Sudetens, and Hitler still less, for he finds his intervention perfectly useless.

Runciman arrives in Prague on 3 August 1938. He first visits Beneš and Hodža, then receives at his hotel the delegates of the Sudeten Party. They appear so desirous of leaving nothing in the dark that their interview with him continues until 1:30 in the morning. At first sight, he has good hope of arriving at a result. But hardly forty-eight hours have elapsed

1. Georges Bonnet, Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 199.

2. Osuský is not deceived by it. “As regards Runciman,” he writes to Prague on 1 August, “he is a man whose every decision is dictated by British raison d'état. If he convinces himself that it is in England’s interest to sacrifice Czechoslovakia, he will sacrifice it without flinching.” (Fritz Berber, Prager Akten, p. 144.)

3. After a vague federal statute (Plan I) proposed by M. Hodža (see above, p. 239), Beneš was preparing to have Parliament vote, on 25 July, a “statute of nationalities,” about which the Sudetens had not been consulted (Plan II). The English Government feared that this vote — carried through too swiftly for the delegates of the S.d.P. to have time to formulate counter-proposals — would provoke the breakdown of negotiations between Czechs and Sudetens. It therefore exerted strong pressure on Beneš to prevent him from carrying out his project, which would have placed the German minority before a fait accompli. (Cf. Boris Celovsky, Das Münchener Abkommen, p. 279, note 5.)

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4. Berlin’s reception is very cold. Solicited to take a position with regard to the mission, the Wilhelmstrasse refuses, on the pretext that the event had been disclosed by the press before it had been brought to its attention. Disappointed, Halifax hastens to correct this false step by sending a letter of apology to Ribbentrop. Berlin nevertheless remains reserved. Halifax then charges M. Dirksen (the Reich ambassador in London, who is spending his holidays in Germany) to deliver a personal message to the Führer, in the hope of winning him over to the English mediation. Hitler, informed of the existence of this message, refuses to receive Dirksen. The ambassador will see him only for a few moments at the Nuremberg Congress, in company with Dieckhoff (ambassador in Washington) and Welczek (ambassador in Paris), but without being able to speak to him about it. The German press likewise remains expectant. It speaks chiefly of the difficulties Runciman will not fail to encounter in Prague. All this is of very bad augury...

[[PDF page 358]]

when he realizes that his task is properly inexecutable. On 10 August, he writes to Lord Halifax: “One question dominates everything: does Hitler want war, or does he not?” On the 18th, Halifax replies to him with a long letter that shows how much the “mediator” is tied to the English Government, despite the contrary assertions of the Foreign Office:

“In the event of the failure of your mission,” he writes to him, “I advise you against suggesting the

slightest compromise. That would have no other effect than to lead one of the two parties to ask England to guarantee its execution. The simplest thing in that case, it seems to me, would be to declare that the mission has been unable to reach any result and that it has decided, consequently, to suspend its work. But since such an announcement might risk precipitating direct action by Germany, it would be good to accompany it with an appeal, suggesting to the interested states that they meet in conference to try to find a solution to the pending problems... Finally, there would also be another means of overcoming the dead point: this would be to resort to a plebiscite. But this idea hardly smiles on me, despite the favorable opinion of Noel-Buxton and the Dean of St. Paul's, because one never knows whether a plebiscite will avoid or precipitate a crisis. I do not exclude it, however, as an ultimate recourse which could rapidly become current. But although, being on the spot, you are obviously a better judge of it than I, the difficulties of such a procedure still seem to me very great." Thus England, which has constantly refused to extend her guarantee to the countries of Eastern Europe, commits herself more and more deeply in this part of the continent.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. From the beginning of June, André François-Poncet proposed the meeting of a Three-Power Conference, whose object would be the neutralization of Czechoslovakia. On 22 July, Sir Nevile Henderson let London know "that in his view, the Runciman mission would end in failure and that it would be better to resort to a Four-Power Conference, including Italy." (Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 532.) The same day, Sir Alexander Cadogan proposes to have Beneš told that "if he does not bow, a plebiscite will be imposed on him." (Id., I, 534.)

3. English politicians, increasingly numerous, declare themselves in favor of a plebiscite, of the neutralization of Czechoslovakia, and of arbitration rendered by the Great Powers.

4. In three editorials published in the Times from 2 to 4 June 1938, M. W. R. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, declared: "In their great majority, the Sudetens wish to be incorporated into the Reich, and England, which has applied the principle of self-determination in its Commonwealth, must respect their will."

[[PDF page 359]]

For several weeks, Lord Runciman will continue laboriously to discuss linguistic questions and the status of civil servants, although these problems have been largely overtaken. Faithful to the tactics prescribed by Hitler and confirmed to Henlein by Ribbentrop on 18 August, the Sudeten delegates strive never to break off the negotiations, while always demanding more than the opposing party can grant them. In this maneuver, which Runciman does not seem to have clearly discerned, Henlein and Frank divide the work between them. Frank, more impetuous than his chief, directs the debates. Henlein, calmer, remains in the background, ready to disavow his deputy if he accepts too many concessions from the Czechs, but ready also to intervene, to tie the thread again if it should break. Entangled in these sterile discussions, Runciman can only seek to gain time...

Seeing that things are treading water, Beneš decides to withdraw the negotiations from M. Hodža in order to take them in hand himself. In doing so, he deeply wounds the President of the Council, who interprets this measure as a lack of confidence. A fissure thus appears between

1. See above, pp. 235–236.

2. On the very day Halifax sends his instructions to Runciman, Ribbentrop notifies Henlein: “It is I, from now on, who am charged with defining the tactics of the S.d.P.”

3. Hitler personally received Henlein on 31 July at the athletic festival of Breslau, in which 30,000 Sudetens took part. He took the opportunity to renew his instructions to him. Moreover, the S.d.P. delegates are in permanent contact with M. Eisenlohr and the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle. Yet the head of the S.d.P. continues to enjoy the confidence of the English. “Henlein,” writes Ashton-Gwatkin to Halifax on 1 September 1938, “is dramatically conscious of the heavy responsibilities weighing on his shoulders. He is convinced, I am certain, that the only possible basis of world peace is a lasting friendship between Germany and England. In his eyes, no essential question separates us. He is a simple and honest man who may succeed with Hitler where a more cunning man would fail.”

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4. Prague would like the rupture to come from the Sudetens; the Sudetens, for the rupture to come from Prague. Each thus seeks to bring Runciman into his game. But the Sudetens themselves are divided. The right wing of the Party, represented by M. Kundt, still believes that the object is to obtain autonomy within the framework of the Czech state, as defined in the Eight Points of Carlsbad. The left wing, on the contrary, represented by Frank, wants the dislocation of the Czech state and attachment to the Reich. Henlein skillfully tacks between the two tendencies without yet showing his hand.

5. All the more because Halifax is convinced that Hitler will not attack Czechoslovakia so long as Runciman stays in Prague.

6. M. Hodža hoped, despite everything, to arrive at an agreement. Beneš wants to demonstrate that any agreement is impossible. One cannot therefore accept without reservation Celovsky’s thesis according to which Beneš sincerely wished to come to terms with the Sudetens. (Das Münchener Abkommen, p. 294.)

[[PDF page 360]]

the President of the Republic and the head of the Government, a fissure that will soon have tragic consequences.

On 24 and 25 August, Beneš, who thinks that tactics must be changed, uses new language with the Sudeten negotiators.

“I readily recognize my errors of the past,” he says to MM. Kundt and Sebekovsky. “As far as I am concerned, I have always been a partisan of an understanding with Germany. The obstacles did not come from me, but from the Czech government parties.”

“Yet those parties did not exist at the time of the Treaty of Versailles,” objects M. Kundt, whom this sudden change of tone makes still more mistrustful.

“The Treaty of Versailles was bad, like all those which follow too closely after a war, because they are influenced by the passions of the victors.”

“And the memoranda you submitted to the Peace Conference?”

“I was not the only one to draft them. One must put oneself back into the atmosphere of the moment... Many faults have been committed on both sides during the last twenty years. Today, the situation is totally different...”

“How then do you explain your attitude of 21 May, when you recalled five classes of reservists? Did you hope to overthrow the National Socialist regime?”

“Never in my life!” protests Beneš. “I would be an idiot or a criminal if I had believed I could overthrow the Nazi regime by measures of that kind! You are very worked up against me. You are wrong. Appearances are deceptive. Trust me. You will see that everything will end by arranging itself...”

But the Sudeten negotiators have not the slightest desire to trust Beneš. Far from attributing his remarks to a sincere desire to reach agreement, they see in them a hypocritical attempt to disarm their vigilance. Their reply is not long in coming. The next day, 26 August, the directing committee of the S.d.P. invites all its adherents to put themselves in a state of “legitimate defense.” Since the circular

[[PDF page 361]]

is immediately seized by the Czech authorities, the fever rises several more degrees in the German districts.

Fearing the worst, London and Paris press Beneš to set down in writing the concessions he is prepared to make. Thus Plan III is born very quickly and is handed to the negotiators of the S.d.P. on 30 August. In it, the President of the Republic makes a few additional concessions, but without leaving the framework of the unity of the state. Yet this stage has long been passed. The German minority no longer demands autonomy. Only its attachment to the Reich is capable of satisfying it. On 2 September, Plan III is rejected both by the S.d.P. and by Lord Runciman.

The next day, 3 September, Beneš summons MM. Kundt and Sebekovsky again.

“Since you reject my proposals,” he tells them, “write yourselves all the demands of your Party. I promise you in advance to grant them immediately.”

As the negotiators of the S.d.P. hesitate, Beneš adds:

“Go on! Write!”

Caught off guard, Kundt and Sebekovsky fall silent, disconcerted.

“Very well! Since you do not want to write, I shall write myself. Dictate your conditions!”

M. Kundt then enumerates the Party’s desiderata. It is on the basis of the notes taken during this interview that the Czech Government works out a new project: Plan IV, which amounts, with minor differences, to acceptance of the Eight Points of Carlsbad.

Adopted on 5 September by the Czechoslovak Cabinet, it is transmitted on the 7th to the leaders of the S.d.P. They read it with manifest embarrassment. They

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1. The Sudetens regard it as “a disavowal of the conciliatory remarks made by Beneš on 24 and 25 August”; Lord Runciman, “as evidence of a grave misunderstanding of the situation.”

2. Interview granted by Beneš to Gedye on 8 October 1945. Celovsky considers this account “very exaggerated.”

4. See above, p. 237. A detailed comparison of the provisions of Plan IV and the Eight Points of Carlsbad will be found in Laffan, The Crisis over Czechoslovakia, p. 240 ff.

5. “In my eyes, as in those of the principal German leaders of the Sudetens,”

[[PDF page 362]]

obviously cannot reject outright a text that satisfies the whole of their demands. But since they know that its application will lead, in a more or less short term, to the dislocation of the Czechoslovak state, and since they do not believe Beneš stupid enough not to have perceived this, they wonder whether it is a trap or whether Beneš has effectively decided to give a new orientation to his policy.

To what extent are their hesitations justified? Certain declarations made afterward by Beneš would tend to prove them right. But on this point, one will always be reduced to conjectures...

For when Plan IV is transmitted to the Sudeten delegates (7 September), Henlein is absent. He left the day before for the Nuremberg Congress, where he is the Führer’s “guest of honor.” Before he returns, events will have taken a dramatic turn. The Czecho-Sudeten negotiations, temporarily suspended, will not be resumed, so that Plan IV will never be discussed...

The Runciman mission has definitively failed. When Lord Halifax’s envoy returns to London, he hands the Foreign Office a report in which he passes severe judgment on the Czechs in general and on the Government of Prague in particular (16 September). His condemnation, which makes a strong impression on the British leaders, will be the only tangible result of his stay in Bohemia.

“For some twenty years,” he writes, “...the Czechoslovak regime has been characterized by a lack of tact and understanding, by petty intolerance and unjust distinctions to such a point that the resentment of the German population

writes Lord Runciman in his report, “this plan took account of almost all the demands set out in the Eight Points of Carlsbad... Negotiations should have been resumed immediately, starting from these favorable and encouraging proposals. But — I am more or less convinced of it — precisely because they were so favorable, they could not please the extremist elements of the Party.” (La Bataille pour la Paix, Imprimerie du Temps, Paris, 1938, p. 92.)

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1. “Plan IV had no other purpose than to unmask Henlein,” Beneš will assert in October 1939 to M. Jaksch, former Social-Democratic deputy in the Prague Parliament.

2. Henlein has convened the Party’s General Assembly for 15 October. As for the negotiations, they are in principle to resume on 13 September.

[[PDF page 363]]

had inevitably to end in revolt. The Sudeten Germans also consider that the Czechoslovak Government has already made them numerous promises and that little, if anything, has resulted from them. Such treatment has given rise in them to an obvious lack of confidence in the statesmen and leaders of the Czech nation... I believe that, on the whole, their complaints are well founded. Quite recently still, when I arrived to fulfill my mission, I observed no disposition on the part of the Czechoslovak authorities to take sufficient measures to put an end to this state of affairs.

“I no longer have any doubt that, in the frontier regions between Czechoslovakia and Germany where the Sudeten Germans are in a strong majority, they should be left entirely free to decide immediately their own fate. If the cession of a part of the country is inevitable, as I think, it would be just as well to act promptly and without further delay. There is a real danger, even of civil war, in maintaining the [present] state of uncertainty. There are therefore excellent reasons for acting promptly and energetically.

“In my opinion, any form of plebiscite or referendum would be only a mere formality as regards the regions where the Germans predominate. A large majority of that population wants attachment to Germany. The inevitable delay that would result from a plebiscite would only arouse popular passions and could have disastrous consequences. I am of the opinion that these frontier regions should be immediately transferred from Czechoslovakia to Germany. Moreover, the two Governments should come to an understanding without delay so that this cession may be effected peacefully and take proper measures to safeguard the interests of the population during the transfer operations.”

This verdict, although kept secret, is not long in filtering into London ruling circles, from whom it removes all desire to support the Czechs further. It reinforces the opinion expressed a month earlier by Lord Rothermere in an open letter to Wickham Steed: “If you yourself, or anyone else, are mad enough to imagine that Great Britain and her Dominions will fight for the Government of Prague, you are under singular illusions.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Letter from Lord Runciman to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, La Bataille pour la Paix, Imprimerie du Temps, pp. 93, 95. In private conversations, Lord Runciman expresses himself in an even harsher way.

[[PDF page 364]]

From now on, the die is cast. Chamberlain and Halifax know where they stand, and M. Dirksen, Reich ambassador in London, is not wrong to write: “One can count on the English consent to obtain

everything that can be obtained, on condition that not a single shot is fired."

1. Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, p. 244. Almost at the same time, Sir Nevile Henderson declares to M. Mastný, Czechoslovak minister in Berlin: "Despite all her sympathies, England will not commit herself directly to a war for your country." (Prager Akten, p. 138.)

[[PDF page 365]]

XVIII
THE CRISIS ENTERS ITS ACUTE PHASE
(3–15 September 1938)

For six months Europe has been living in a storm atmosphere. Now the tempest is about to break.

Robert Ingrim has noted among the traits of Hitler's character "an extraordinary capacity to dramatize situations." Carl Burckhardt, for his part, was struck by "his astonishing power of simplification." It is, in fact, by dramatizing and simplifying things that Hitler will advance to cut this Gordian knot.

Those who saw him move in September 1938 between the equally formidable reefs of diplomatic negotiation and armed intervention, with the assurance of a sleepwalker skirting a precipice, were left breathless by it. From where did he derive this infallible assurance? Which of his two hands corresponded to his intimate convictions: the one that brandished the thunderbolt or the one that extended the olive branch?

At the time, the answer to these questions could not be discerned. Today, we know it. Hitler possessed a considerable advantage over all his interlocutors because he wanted war and was not disposed to make any concession to avoid it. Better still: he formulated demands only in the hope of seeing them refused.

He wanted war not because he was mad, but because, in his particular optics, it would have been mad not to want it. He tells himself that events will never furnish him a better casus belli, since by intervening to liberate the Sudetens, he will act in the name of the free right of peoples to self-determination. His army, despite its inadequacies, is by far the most powerful war machine on the continent. The Red Army is in full crisis — which Stalin does not ignore — and neither France nor England has anything equivalent to set against him. His allies are not lacking either. He knows that he can count on the benevolent neutrality of Spain, on the support of Italy,

[[PDF page 366]]

Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria. At the first success of his arms, Yugoslavia and Romania will swing to his side. Certainly, they will not increase his military potential, but they will supply him with raw materials he needs and will deprive his adversaries of as many moral supports. He is therefore sure of winning this war, and an attentive examination of the situation demonstrates that he is not wrong. The anxieties expressed by some of his generals leave him indifferent, for they cannot prevail over the balance of forces. Yet never will this balance be more favorable to him. For a long time already, Hitler had felt that England would not intervene. Since Wiedemann's trip to London and the sending of the

Runciman mission to Prague, that feeling has been transformed into certainty. As a result, France will not intervene either, and still less the U.S.S.R., which subordinates its entry into the war to that of France. What, then, would he fear? To wait another one or two years would be to expose himself to a grave risk: that Europe might rearm in the interval...

Hitler told his generals that he would give the signal for attack only when he had the certainty that the democracies

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2. “When Germany’s military potential has reached its maximum level,” he told his generals on 5 November 1937, “the conditions required for an offensive against Czechoslovakia will be assembled and, by that very fact, we shall be in a position to settle victoriously the problem of German space, even if one or another of the Great Powers attacks us... But if, as a consequence of England’s aversion to a European war, her lack of interest in the problem of Central Europe, or the imminence of a Franco-Italian conflict in the Mediterranean, a situation were created in which no Power — apart from Russia — would be on Czechoslovakia’s side, Plan Green should be executed before our military potential had reached its highest level.” (Hermann Gackenholz, Reichskanzlei, 5 November 1937, in Festgabe für Fritz Hartung, Berlin, 1958, p. 460.) Germany would then have to complete her rearmament while giving battle “for,” Hitler affirms, “the political situation must prevail over military preparation.”

would not react. Now this certainty has been acquired. He can go forward. At the first battering blow, the whole edifice of Central Europe will collapse. For his true objective is not the annexation of the Sudetens: it is the destruction of Czechoslovakia. Important though it may be, the liberation of the German minority has only secondary interest. It is a pretext that serves to wrap broader ambitions.

On 3 September, Hitler convenes a new military conference at the Berghof in order to put the finishing touches to the plan for invading Czechoslovakia. Taking part in it are General Keitel, chief of the O.K.W.; General von Brauchitsch, Commander-in-Chief of the Army; and Major Schmundt. This time, the plan of operations has been considerably simplified. One no longer encounters in it any of the alternatives that still appeared in the directives of 7 July and that had so sharply worried General Beck.

“The field units will set themselves in motion on 28 September,” begins General von Brauchitsch. “From that date, they will be ready to enter action. As soon as D-Day is known, the field units, to preserve the effect of surprise, will continue their exercises in a direction opposite to the Czech frontier...”

“No!” Hitler interrupts him in an imperative tone. “The troops will be assembled two days’ march from the frontier. It is enough to ensure good camouflage of the maneuvers. I shall make D-Day known to the O.K.W. on 27 September at noon.”

The invasion plan comprises a triple land offensive,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. “When I arrived at the Führer’s personal staff,” writes General Walter Warlimont, “General Jodl made it clear to the newcomer that I was that the goal of the military preparations was not only the

incorporation of the Sudetens into the Reich, as reading the press had led me to think, but the total annihilation of Czechoslovakia as an independent state." (Im Hauptquartier der Deutschen Wehrmacht, 1939–1946, p. 33.)

[[PDF page 368]]

combined with a powerful air offensive. In the north, the Second Army, massed in Silesia in the Glatz region, will march southward, in the direction of Olmütz and Brünn (Brno); in the center, the Tenth Army, massed in Bavaria between Nuremberg and Weiden, will cross the frontier in the Eger (Cheb) region and march on Prague by way of Pilsen, Horovitz, and Beroun; in the south, the Twelfth and Fourteenth Armies, massed in Lower Austria, will march northward in the direction of Brünn, where they will join up with the Second Army.

The land operations will be preceded and supported by a lightning attack by the Luftwaffe. This will be carried out by 2,000 aircraft, massed around the borders of Czechoslovakia. A first wave, executed at low level by groups of Dornier 17s and Heinkel IIIs, will destroy on the first day the military objectives near the frontier and the airfields. It will be followed by a second wave of Junkers 87 dive-bombers, which will attack small-sized objectives whose immediate disabling will facilitate the advance of the land forces. Finally, a third wave will have the objective of pulverizing all the strategic centers situated inside the country. Before the deployment of this whole array of means, it may be presumed that Czech resistance will not be of very long duration...

But a discussion arises between Hitler and Brauchitsch over the importance of the role entrusted to each army. The Commander-in-Chief of the Army considers that the emphasis must be placed on the pincer operation of the Second, Twelfth, and Fourteenth Armies, starting respectively from Silesia and Austria. Hitler, for his part, thinks that the progress of these armies will be slowed in the north by the powerful fortifications that the Czechs must have erected facing the Glatz region; in the south, by the poor condition of the lines of communication. He therefore prefers to place the bulk of the effort on the army of the center (Tenth Army), by attaching to it all available armored and motorized divisions.

This arrangement upsets the operational plan envisaged by the O.K.H. Brauchitsch seeks to oppose it. He objects that it would be a serious error to entrust the decisive action to the Tenth Army, because of the broken nature of the terrain, the narrowness of the roads, and the insufficient state of training

[[PDF page 369]]

of the motorized divisions. But Hitler refuses to modify his point of view:

"A breakthrough carried out in the sector of the Second Army will not be rapid enough for tactical success to be transformed into strategic success. The result will be treading water, stagnation, and finally a hemorrhage comparable to that of Verdun. Whereas a thrust in the center, in the sector of the Tenth Army, has every chance of succeeding. Once the breakthrough has been made at this point, the southern front will collapse of itself. A single army, in the heart of Bohemia, will carry the decision."

[Map text retained]

SILESIA — Second Army — Glatz — Eger — PRAGUE — BOHEMIA — Stribro — Beroun — Pilsen — Nuremberg — MORAVIA — BAVARIA — Twelfth and Fourteenth Armies — VIENNA

The plan for the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

The Führer ends his exposition by ordering the intensification of work on the western fortifications, notably in the regions of Saarbrücken and Aix-la-Chapelle, and the construction of 300 to 400 additional casemates, representing an increase of 1,600 gun ports.

The military conference ends rather quickly, for Hitler has a very full schedule: he must supervise

[[PDF page 370]]

the final preparations for the Nuremberg Congress, which is to open the morning after next.

The Congress begins in the early hours of 5 September. It is the vastest gathering that National Socialist Germany has ever seen. The preceding Congress had called itself the “Congress of Labor.” This one is placed under the invocation of the “Greater German Reich.” To symbolize the reincorporation of Austria into Germany, the Habsburg treasures have been brought from Vienna and joined to certain pieces borrowed from the Aachen treasury. The crown of the Holy Empire and the sword of Charlemagne sparkle in an illuminated display case, before which S.S. men of the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler stand guard, in black uniforms and white gloves. And once again there is the endless parade of the youth organizations, the formations of the Labor Service, the Assault Sections, and the Black Militias, amid the acclamations of a crowd of nearly a million spectators. The tiers of the Zeppelinfeld are packed full. The diplomatic corps and the military, naval, and air attachés have been brought by special trains. The participation of Austrian and Sudeten delegations, and the presence in the official tribune of Seyss-Inquart and Konrad Henlein, give the demonstration a character even broader than in previous years. More tense also, for everyone knows that decisive events are imminent.

And, once again, there unfolds that strange phenomenon which is the total communion of a crowd and an individual. “It was at Nuremberg,” writes Paul Stehlin, the French air attaché, who is certainly not suspect of pro-Nazi feelings, “that I was most astonished, even subjugated at certain moments, by Hitler’s oratorical talent. I do not know whether many men in history have known how to hold the attention of so great a number of listeners for a length of time that was long, but did not seem so, by arousing to the end an interest, an expectation, and an approval that grew from one salvo of applause and acclaim

[[PDF page 371]]

to the next.” Grégoire Gafenco, Romanian Foreign Minister, notes for his part: “When, following a formula or an idea, Hitler became sufficiently heated to yield something of himself, the sound of his voice and still more the meaning of his words, the choice of his arguments, the sequence of his thoughts, seemed to find themselves in unison with an invisible force that surrounded him. He then became a demagogue in the ancient sense of the word: the man who lends his voice to the crowd and through whom the crowd speaks. His personality took on a mysterious amplitude, an indefinitely

prolonged rumbling accompanied his speech, and the miracle was accomplished: behind him, one felt it, there was his double — a collective double: the ‘mass,’ the innumerable crowd, the people — and the speech had the bearing of a great army on the march... If the crowd had had a single voice to say it, it would have chosen his arguments, used his formulas, and spoken like him.

“His most reserved interlocutors did not escape the grip of his force. He had the gift of inspiring in those who resisted him a feeling of isolation. Before the flood of his impetuous words, which tended to assault and encircle the mind, one never felt small — but one felt alone. One was not speaking with one man, but with a million men.”

In the midst of the Nuremberg Congress, during the night of 9 to 10 September, Hitler gathers his generals one last time to make sure that everything is ready for the invasion of Czechoslovakia and that his instructions have been scrupulously followed. The conference, begun at 10 p.m., ends only at 3:30 in the morning, and one wonders how Hitler, who already has behind him an exhausting day and who must preside over new parades in a few hours, still finds the energy to direct the debates. Present are: General Keitel, General von Brauchitsch, General Halder, who has just succeeded General Beck in the functions of Chief of the General Staff, Major Schmundt, Captain Engel, and Captain von Below.

[[PDF page 372]]

General Halder, who has worked out the plan of operations, speaks first. His aim is to convince Hitler that the main effort should not be placed on the Tenth Army — as Hitler advocates — but on the offensive of the Second, Twelfth, and Fourteenth Armies.

“The objective to be attained,” he says, “consists in preventing the Czech Army from withdrawing into Moravia. For that, we must beat it and provoke a rapid decision. This objective can be attained thanks to a pincer attack carried out in the direction of Olmütz and Brünn by the Second and Fourteenth Armies. But since transport from Austria into Moravia poses difficult problems, it is necessary to place the main effort on the Second Army.”

Halder then reviews the arguments that support this solution:

“The Tenth Army faces the Pilsen junction, which is solidly fortified. The roads are bad. The tanks will have to break through and secure bridgeheads for the troops that follow, which will slow their advance. Several Czech defensive lines that benefit from the advantages of the terrain will delay the secondary breakthroughs and permit the adversary to withdraw troops from other sectors to reinforce the center. It would be better to prevent him from doing so. Finally, the heights of Bohemia, which will stand before our troops during the last phase of their advance, will favor this probable tactic of the Czechs. By contrast, the pincer offensive on the rear allows these heights to be avoided by turning them.

“The adversary does not possess concentrations of armored forces. They are dispersed and consist of light units.

“It is objected that powerful defenses will oppose a rapid advance by the Second Army in the north. An examination of the situation shows that these obstacles are much less formidable than might have been supposed. The weaknesses of the adversary in this sector have been recognized. The fortifications are only partially completed. The armored turrets are generally empty. There are large gaps. The Oppa

River is not an obstacle: it is

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. This is the plan suggested by General Gamelin to General Syrový and which the Czech Minister of Defense has decided to apply. (See above, p. 303.)

8. These are the Brdy mountains, which extend between Příbram and Beroun.

[[PDF page 373]]

crossable by tanks as well as by infantry. There are no armored forces opposite. Freudenthal would have only a garrison of thirty-five men. The light motorized forces placed by the Czechs on the right flank do not represent a danger. There is therefore no risk of stagnation that would bleed us white, for the rear-guard formations can be rapidly brought to the points where success is achieved.

“As for the Twelfth and Fourteenth Armies, they will operate together. Their columns must support one another reciprocally during their advance and provoke the collapse of the front. The southern frontier of Bohemia is only weakly defended: one division for one hundred and twenty kilometers. The operation is therefore destined for success. After its advance northward, the Twelfth Army will turn eastward and rush upon Brünn.”

But Hitler refuses to be convinced and maintains his point of view entirely:

“Since the restoration of compulsory military service and still more after the events of last March,” he replies, alluding to the Anschluss, “it must be presumed that the adversary has developed his fortifications facing our Second Army. That is where he expects us. He is obliged to hold firm at this point, otherwise it is useless for him to keep the rest of the front. One must expect to find here the best regiments and the best fortifications. Resistance on the front of the Second Army will decide the fate of Czechoslovakia. There is no doubt that the pincer maneuver of the Twelfth and Fourteenth Armies is the most desirable solution and that it must be realized. But its success is too uncertain for us to count on it alone. All the more because a rapid success of our arms is indispensable from the political point of view. In this respect, the first week will be decisive. During those eight days, we must have secured significant territorial gains.”

In other words: Prague must be reached as quickly as possible, to demonstrate to London and Paris that they have lost the game. For that, nothing must be changed in the plan envisaged, and priority must continue to be given to the action of the Tenth Army.

[[PDF page 374]]

After a discussion concerning the distribution of the armored and motorized divisions and the accelerated strengthening of the western fortifications, the conference ends in a depressed atmosphere. What a contrast with the storms of acclamation that rose toward the Führer throughout the afternoon!

Halder is furious. Beck had certainly told him that the Führer listened to no advice and followed only

his personal impulses. But he had not believed that it was to this degree. The new Chief of the General Staff — for whom this is the first personal confrontation with Hitler — finds intolerable his way of meddling in the smallest details and the right he arrogates to himself to fix personally the distribution of units among the different armies. He has presented to him a meticulously studied plan, and everything must be redone. He suddenly perceives how obstinate Hitler is and how difficult it is to bring him back from a decision once he has taken it.

Keitel too is in a very bad mood. Back at the O.K.W., he gathers the members of his staff and tells them: “I shall no longer tolerate here any tall stories, hesitations, or defeatism of any kind!”

As for General Jodl, he notes in his diary:

“The Führer knows very well that the Commander-in-Chief of the Army [Brauchitsch] has asked the generals to support him in his efforts to open the Führer’s eyes to the dangers of the adventure into which he wants to launch himself. That is why the conference

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The 2nd Armored Division may be left in the sector of the Fourteenth Army, where it will serve as spearhead for the 29th Motorized Division; however, the 2nd and 13th Motorized Divisions will be transferred into the sector of the Tenth Army.

2. To which an additional contingent of 236,000 men from the Labor Service will be devoted.

3. “I had taken up again the plan prepared by Manstein, which I had modified on several points by strengthening the double offensive from Austria and Silesia,” writes Halder. “This new disposition was submitted to the Führer during the Nuremberg Congress. General Warlimont is right to say that the O.K.W. refrained from intervening. But unfortunately not Hitler! He upset the distribution of the troops, notably that of the armored units. Moreover, until the last minute, he gave new directives concerning the use of the air forces and formations of Party militants, thus compromising the unity of the plan of operations.” (Letter to the author, 28 July 1964.)

4. It is surprising to see Halder grow irritated to this degree over modifications of detail, since he is preparing a coup de force intended, as we shall see farther on, to render the whole invasion plan inexecutable.

5. Allusion to the meeting of generals held on 4 August 1938 at General Beck’s home. (See above, p. 285 ff.)

HISTORY OF THE GERMAN ARMY, V: THE TRIALS OF STRENGTH (1938)
Benoist-Méchin

English translation — Section 8 of 10
PDF pages 375–423
Translation note: rapid, accuracy-focused translation from the corrected embedded text layer. No new OCR was performed. Page markers from the source text are preserved.

[[PDF page 375]]

held at Nuremberg took place in an icy atmosphere. It is deeply distressing to see that the Führer has the entire people behind him, but not the principal leaders of the Army.

“In my opinion, they will be able to repair only by deeds the wrong they are doing [the country] by their pusillanimity and their lack of discipline. It is the same problem as in 1914. There is only one disobedience in the Army: that of the generals. It comes, in the last analysis, from their presumption. They can neither believe nor obey, because they underestimate the genius of the Führer. They still see in him only the corporal of the First World War, and not the greatest statesman we have had since Bismarck.”

Meanwhile, the Nuremberg Congress is drawing to its close, and the whole world is listening to know what the Führer will say about Czechoslovakia in his closing speech.

On 10 September, Beneš decides to cut the ground from under his feet by speaking before him, in order to soften the shock that his declarations risk giving to foreign opinion:

“Because of the geographical situation of our country,” declares the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, “it has had to set itself first to the difficult problem of nationalities. In its Plan IV, the Czech Government has proposed a solution that guarantees the rights of all the nationalities of the Republic, in proportion to their number. This represents a great sacrifice for our State. It has nevertheless accepted it in the interest of peace, of the peaceful settlement of European disputes, and as a preamble to sincere collaboration with all its neighbors, especially with Germany. The Czechoslovak Government has thus provided Europe and America — not to mention England and France — with tangible proof that it is conscious of the duties incumbent upon it. If these conditions are fulfilled, the Republic

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. General Jodl means 1918. He is thinking of the conference of generals held at Spa on 9 November, on the eve of the collapse of the Second Reich. (See vol. I, p. 27 ff.)

2. Documents of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, Jodl Diary, 10, 12, 13 September 1938, vol. XV, p. 390, and XXXIV, pp. 335–337. Doc. G-102.

3. Delivered on 7 September to the delegation of the S.d.P., but which has not yet been the subject of a discussion between the two parties. (See above, p. 358.)

of Czechoslovakia will become one of the most beautiful, most flourishing, and best administered States in the world. I have always been optimistic, but I must say that my optimism has never been as great as it is today!”

This speech is not long in receiving its answer. For on 12 September, the closing day of the Congress, Goebbels, Göring, and Hitler reply to it, each in his own fashion. The Minister of Propaganda opens fire with an ideological diatribe in which he accuses Czechoslovakia of being a hotbed of communist subversion and a permanent danger in the center of Europe.

“Beneš,” he declares, “was raised to the presidency only thanks to the supplementary votes of the communists. The Bureau of the Communist International has established itself in Prague, with the blessing of the Hradčany. There is a situation there whose explosive character cannot be underestimated!”

Göring then resumes the attack, personalizing it:

“It is intolerable,” he cries, “that a little remnant of a people whose origin no one knows should arrogate to itself the right to persecute and enslave a population in whom one of the greatest civilizations of history is embodied! We know that these runts would not dare it if they were not encouraged by Moscow. Behind their actions we discern the grimacing mask of a Judeo-Bolshevik clique. To this ridiculous attempt to intimidate us, I should like to oppose the words of Marshal Roon: ‘We Germans have always been good shots, but we have never soiled our breeches!’”

Finally Hitler appears at the top of the stone tribune, greeted by an ovation that lasts more than a quarter of an hour. When silence finally returns, he begins to speak in a muffled voice, which becomes more and more hoarse as he advances in his speech. He begins

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The Prague newspapers reproduce this speech under the title: “Confidence in the Future.”

3. Allusion to Beneš’s small stature. German propaganda had already used this argument to ridicule Chancellor Dollfuss.

4. Gute Schiesser aber niemals Scheisser. This speech is enough to reduce to nothing the accusations brought today against Beneš by communist historians, namely that he “was only a pawn in Hitler’s game, an accomplice of his plans for expansion to the east.” (Cf. Václav Král, O Masarykove, pp. 151, 164.)

[[PDF page 377]]

by enumerating all the efforts he has made to eliminate the contentious problems that might have brought him into conflict with the Western Powers. He recalls that he renounced South Tyrol in order to conciliate Italy; that he renounced Alsace-Lorraine in order to conciliate France; that he recognized Belgian and Dutch neutrality; that he limited the tonnage of his fleet to 35 percent of England’s in order to conciliate the British Empire. Then he announces the construction of the western fortifications, which he presents as a contribution to peace and proof that he nourishes no aggressive intention toward his western neighbors. After that, he comes to the burning problem:

“I now come to speak to you of Czechoslovakia. On 20 May last, it believed it could intimidate us by taking mobilization measures. I wish to warn that I shall strike pitilessly if such a provocation is repeated. M. Beneš is applying a tactic that consists in saying that he wants to organize negotiations on the Geneva model. He believes that it is enough to make small gifts to his interlocutors in order to keep them quiet and demonstrate his generosity. Now, that is enough! It is not a matter of gifts, nor of rhetorical flowers: it is a matter of restoring rights that have been violated. What the Germans demand is not phrases, but the right to dispose of themselves. I too demand that the oppression of three and a

half million Germans in Czechoslovakia cease and that in its place their right of self-determination be recognized. I should regret it if this question could disturb our relations with other European States, but if that were to happen the fault could not be imputed to us alone! Let the Czechoslovak Government assemble the delegates of the Sudetens and settle the question with them, in one way or another. My task, and your task, my dear compatriots, consists in seeing to it that justice is not transformed into injustice. For it is a matter of our German brothers. I am in no way disposed to let other statesmen create a new Palestine in the heart of German living space. The poor Arabs are disarmed and abandoned. But the Germans of Czechoslovakia are neither disarmed nor abandoned. I wish this to be taken note of!"

[[PDF page 378]]

European opinion, which is trying to reassure itself, finds this speech less alarming than might have been feared. After all, people say to themselves, the head of the Third Reich invokes the right of peoples to dispose of themselves and affirms that it is for the Czechoslovak Government to settle the Sudeten problem. It is therefore permissible to hope that war can be averted.

What gives this speech an alarming character is not the words it contains: it is the events that accompany it. For since the previous day, 11 September, the beginning of an uprising has been taking place among the Sudetens. Late in the evening of the 11th and throughout the day of the 12th, incidents and bloody clashes multiply. Fighting begins in the villages and in the towns. Prague announces twenty-three dead, of whom thirteen are Czechs, and a large number wounded. On 13 September, the Czechoslovak Government proclaims a state of siege in thirteen Sudeten districts.

The same day, K. H. Frank, Henlein's deputy, who has returned hastily from Nuremberg, presides at Eger over a meeting of the S.d.P. steering committee. Since the Czech Government invites him to come to Prague to resume

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. "The Nuremberg speech was immediately regarded as an encouraging manifestation, diminishing European tension," write Geneviève Vallette and Jacques Bouillon. "The commentators no longer believe possible, at least immediately, a German-Czechoslovak war. Most put forward the hypothesis of an amicable settlement in the following days. The Times approves the idea of self-determination for the Germans of Czechoslovakia (13 September). Le Temps emphasizes the conciliatory remarks made by Hitler toward the Western Powers (14 September). Émile Roche suggests the meeting of a Four-Power Conference. (La République, 13 September.) As for Léon Blum, he declares in Le Populaire of 13 September: 'This speech is neither a diktat nor an ultimatum. It does not announce an act of force. It does not make it inevitable... The military invasion of Czechoslovakia seems ruled out. What Chancellor Hitler will now attempt is infiltration and decomposition from within.'" (Munich, 1938, Collection Kiosque, Paris, 1964, pp. 130–133.)

2. These incidents, Prague will say, were unleashed by agents provocateurs of the S.d.P. That is probable, for in the papers of State Secretary von Weizsäcker, under the date 10 September 1938, the following indication is found: "The Sudeten Party has received the instruction to provoke and create incidents. These are to reach their culmination on Tuesday the 13th." (Communiqué of the [Czech] Consulate in Dresden to the Ministry of the Interior, W. Trial, prosecution documents, vol. 3 A, NG-2749.) But the Sudeten populations are already in such a state of exasperation that not much is

needed to set fire to the powder.

[[PDF page 379]]

the talks on Plan IV, he telephones President Hodža in the evening to tell him that the S.d.P. consents, but on five conditions:

1. That the Czech State Police be withdrawn from the Sudeten districts;
2. That the units of the Czech Army be confined to their quarters;
3. That the state of siege be lifted;
4. That the restoration of order be entrusted to the local authorities;
5. That these measures be made known to the population by radio.

Frank gives the Czech Government six hours to accept these conditions. After midnight, he will no longer answer for anything.

At 11 p.m., M. Hodža picks up his telephone and lets Frank know “that the Czech Government agrees to discuss the terms of the ultimatum.” Frank at once dispatches to Prague M. Kundt, chairman of the S.d.P. negotiations commission. But a few moments later he receives contrary instructions from Henlein. Kundt therefore calls M. Hodža back to notify him “that the events that have occurred in the last forty-eight hours do not permit him to continue the conversations, that the deadlines fixed by the ultimatum have expired, and that consequently he has dissolved the negotiation commission.” Henceforth all ties are broken between the Sudeten leaders and Prague. The leaders of the S.d.P. leave Eger and fall back to Asch, on the edge of the German frontier.

On the 14th, calm tends to be restored in the Sudeten districts, for the repression is severe and the population, seized by fear,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. When the text of Plan IV was delivered to the Sudeten delegation on 7 September, Henlein and Frank had left for the Nuremberg Congress. The negotiations had therefore been suspended. (See above, p. 358, n. 2.) The date of 13 September had been fixed for their resumption.

2. “On the evening of 13 September,” writes Lord Runciman in his Report, “M. Henlein refused this condition [the sending of a delegate to Prague] and the negotiations were completely broken off... In my opinion, MM. Henlein and Frank must bear responsibility for the final rupture, as well as their supporters, both inside the country and outside, who incited them to extremist and unconstitutional acts.” On the rupture of the negotiations, see Krofta, Z do, p. 316 ff.; Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, 466, 467; Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 466–467; Id., II, 860, 869, 871, 880, 888, 889, 891, 892.

[[PDF page 380]]

begins to fear reprisals. On the 15th, Henlein transmits the following declaration to the steering committee of the S.d.P. with the order to disseminate it immediately in his name:

“The leading members of the S.d.P., meeting at Asch, fully conscious of their responsibilities, proclaim before the face of the world:

“Czech democracy has let fall its mask! Defenseless women and children, hundreds of dead and gravely wounded, accuse it! Under cover of humanitarian slogans, they murder and plunder! What is happening today in the heart of Europe can be compared only with the atrocities committed by the Bolsheviks in Spain. The Germans of the Sudetenland affirm to the world, through the voice of their leaders, that they have striven until the last moment to make a peaceful solution prevail. But the Czech Government has rejected all the demands formulated by Konrad Henlein. Because of the conditions reigning on the territory of the Czech State, it is normal that every Sudeten use all the means at his disposal to put his life and that of his family beyond the abuses of the pillaging and murderous hordes!”

This declaration, broadcast by Leipzig radio in the morning of the 15th and reproduced the next day by the whole German press, is interpreted by the Sudeten populations as a call to exodus. Men, women, and children begin to pile their belongings into cars, carts, or handcarts. But the Czech authorities forbid them to leave their places of residence and block them where they are.

A few hours later, Henlein launches a new proclamation by radio:

“Compatriots!

“The use of machine-guns, armored cars, and tanks against the defenseless Sudeten population, carried out under everyone’s eyes by the oppressive apparatus of the Czech Government, makes any coexistence with it definitively impossible.

“The experiences gathered over twenty years of

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Throughout the night of the 13th to 14th, it waited in vain for the arrival of German troops.

2. This is very exaggerated. Calm has more or less been restored. The text of this declaration is found in Dokumente der Deutschen Politik, VI, IS., p. 308.

tyranny and the bloody sacrifices of these last years compel me to declare:

“We want to live free! We want to recover Peace and Work in our Homeland! We want to return to the Reich! May God bless us, and our just cause!”

The same day, the Czech Government issues an arrest warrant against Henlein, on the charge of offenses against the security of the State. But Henlein runs little risk of being arrested: he has fled to Germany with the principal leaders of his Party. Several thousand young men fit to bear arms follow his example. They pack their suitcases and clandestinely cross the frontier of the Reich.

Learning that an arrest warrant has been issued against Henlein, Hitler says to Ward Price:

“If Henlein is arrested, I shall become the leader of the Sudetens, and then we shall see how long M. Beneš continues to sign his decrees! Let us hope he will not issue an arrest warrant against me!”

As a measure of retaliation, he gives M. Eisenlohr the order to return to Berlin and to make German diplomatic representation in Prague “as thin as possible.”

Meanwhile, the German military machinery sets itself in motion. From the end of the Nuremberg Congress, Colonel Stehlin has sent to the Air Ministry in Paris a report that ends with this warning: “The worst eventualities must be envisaged and the Reich’s military apparatus can be set in motion at any moment.”

Indeed, the characteristic signs of the passage from the state of peace to the state of war are accumulating. A large number of reserve officers have been called up. Call-up orders, carried by policemen, have even reached those concerned in the cinemas of the city of Cologne. The

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1. It seems that during these days Henlein had no direct contact with the leaders of the S.d.P. (Cf. Dokumente zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, 481.)

3. The Reich Minister in Prague is deeply affected by this. He thinks that “it would be the moment or never to remain on the spot,” which proves that he was not informed of Hitler’s intentions. (Cf. Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, p. 475.)

measures taken for the requisition of civilian personnel and vehicles for the needs of fortification work multiply. In Dresden, the civil organization for air defense has undertaken a major alert exercise, which has extended over several days. The city has remained in darkness for two nights in succession. A rehearsal on a larger scale is announced for the second half of September. In Berlin, people live in expectation of an exercise of the same kind. “The German authorities,” writes Paul Stehlin, “thus show their concern to neglect nothing for the preparation of the civilian population, among whom these measures have created a genuine war psychosis.”

Hidden in his eagle’s nest in the Bavarian Alps, Hitler carefully observes the evolution of the situation. The immobile center of a cyclone whose principal elements he himself orchestrates, he watches the comings and goings of ambassadors, studies the reactions of foreign capitals, sends directives to his generals, has himself kept informed of the situation among the Sudetens, telephones instructions to Henlein, orders blackout maneuvers, and himself supervises the concentration of the Luftwaffe.

Another man, too, is observing the situation: General Halder. The new Chief of the General Staff of the land forces shares the apprehensions of his predecessor. Like Beck, he is convinced that a war — whatever its initial successes — can end only in Germany’s crushing defeat. He has long felt a violent antipathy for Hitler, which the Führer’s interventions at the conference of 10 September have further increased. He is disgusted by the submission shown by men such as Reichenau, Keitel, and Jodl.

On the other hand, he maintains friendly relations with most of the generals of the opposition, among

others the

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2. “Any war unleashed by Germany,” Beck is accustomed to affirming, “will immediately draw into its orbit other States than the country attacked. This world coalition will crush Germany and will finally put her at the mercy of the victor.” (Deutschland in einem kommenden Kriege, study drafted in November 1938.)

General von Witzleben, Colonel Oster, General Olbricht, and General Hoepner, who commands an armored unit. Halder is certain that Hitler is rushing toward disaster. In a few days France, England, and Russia will oppose a formal veto to his claims on Czechoslovakia. His prestige will be so gravely damaged by it that the moment will have come to overthrow him.

Beck has resigned. Adam has been dismissed. Nevertheless, the conspiracy has not disappeared for all that. Following Goerdeler, some of its members — notably Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin and the embassy counselor Theodor Kordt — have gone to see the English to beg them to stand firm and inflict on Hitler a crushing defeat that will allow them to unseat him. But if Churchill and Vansittart have listened to them with interest, neither Chamberlain nor Halifax has taken them seriously. They have seen in them embittered men, incapable of doing anything by themselves, but ready to plunge their country into chaos solely in order to satisfy their hatred of the regime. They attach so little credit to their declarations that they do not even judge it useful to inform Paris of them.

The project for the collective resignation of the Army commanders, devised by Beck in the course of the month of August, has failed miserably. It required an esprit de corps that the German High Command no longer possesses and had the disadvantage of letting too many people into the secret. The soundings made in London have produced nothing either. Convinced, like Retz, that the best

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. The brother of Erich Kordt, of Ribbentrop’s cabinet. These two enemies of the regime work “in the shadows.” Theodor holds the functions of counselor at the Embassy in London.

3. They are both resolute opponents of the policy of conciliation.

4. “I have seen the German emissary,” Chamberlain writes to Halifax, speaking of von Kleist. “He is an opponent of Hitler, blinded by his enmity. He reminds me of the Jacobite émigrés of the time of King William III. He has only one idea: to excite his German friends and push them to a putsch. There is certainly much to subtract from his assertions.” (Cited by Gerhard Ritter, Échec au Dictateur, p. 112.) Halifax, for his part, thinks that if, by some impossibility, the conspirators carried out their plan, the only beneficiaries would be the Russians.

6. Apart from a letter of encouragement given by Churchill to Kleist. (Ritter, op. cit., p. 112.) “Practically,” writes Gerd Buchheit, “it was a matter of forcing the English hand by bringing them to threaten to declare war.” (Ludwig Beck, p. 179.) But, as Joseph Kennedy, United States Ambassador in London, will later say, “the English were not mad enough to overturn their policy and risk losing a war for the beaux yeux of a small clique of conspirators who in no way possessed the importance they attributed to themselves.”

[[PDF page 384]]

conspiracies are the swiftest and most compact, Halder comes to think that the only way to get rid of Hitler is a military coup de force. Let a handful of resolute men go forward; let them put their colleagues before the accomplished fact. They will then be obliged to follow them...

For that, Halder and Witzleben have conceived a new plan, whose execution will fall principally to General Brockdorff-Ahlefeld, who commands the 23rd Infantry Division at Potsdam, and to Colonel Paul von Hase, who commands the 50th Infantry Regiment at Landsberg-on-the-Warthe. As soon as Hitler gives the order to attack Czechoslovakia, these units will march on Berlin by night and take position on the outskirts of the capital. Their movement will pass unnoticed amid the comings and goings of troops that will take place at that moment. No difficulty is to be feared from Count Helldorf, whose deputy, Count Fritz von der Schulenburg, is part of the conspiracy and who will provide the support of some police contingents. Finally Halder has left in Thuringia, halfway between Berlin and the Fichtelgebirge, General Hoepner's armored formation. Its role will consist in preventing the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler from moving back up toward the capital to bring help to its leader.

On an agreed signal, armed detachments will encircle the Chancellery and seize Hitler, who will immediately be reduced to impotence and replaced by General Beck. The latter will address a proclamation to the German people, announcing that Hitler is dead and that he has charged M. Goerdeler with forming a new government...

Meanwhile, night falls over London. Yet one window remains lit on the second floor of 10 Downing Street. Seated at his work table, Chamberlain reflects.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Halder counts on making use of the forty-eight-hour delay that will elapse between the moment when Hitler gives the marching order to the O.K.H. and the moment when hostilities actually begin.

[[PDF page 385]]

Will they let the continent slip into the abyss without making the slightest gesture to hold it back? The French press him to convene a Three-Power Conference and to connect its convocation with Lord Runciman's declaration. Colonel Lindbergh has described to him in impressive terms the power of the Luftwaffe. Bonnet is said to have recently told Phipps: "War must be avoided at all costs, for neither France nor Great Britain is in a position to wage it." Sir Nevile Henderson, who keeps him informed almost hour by hour of events, multiplies his telephone calls and begs him not to fall into the same error as Sir Edward Grey, whose silence and indecision had contributed not a little to precipitating the war of 1914. "Write a personal letter to Hitler," he has told him. "Explain your position to him clearly..."

On 30 August, returning from a visit to Balmoral Castle, Chamberlain had an idea that he disclosed to his own people only in veiled terms:

"I spend my time racking my brains," he wrote to his sister on 3 September 1938, "to discover a means of averting the catastrophe, if it should be about to fall upon us. I have found one, so bold and so unconventional, that it almost took Halifax's breath away. But since Henderson thinks it might be

capable of saving the situation at the eleventh hour, I have not abandoned it, while constantly hoping that it will not be necessary to resort to it."

A few days later, he returned to the same idea in a second letter to his sister:

"In finishing my last letter, I was wondering what would happen before I wrote to you again, for I knew that the hour was approaching — if it had to come. Two conditions were indispensable: that my project be attempted at the moment when things appeared darkest, and that it be a complete surprise. On Tuesday night, I understood that the moment had come

[[PDF page 386]]

and that the step had to be taken, if I did not want to arrive too late..."

Thus, during the night of 13 to 14 September, Chamberlain sends the following message to the Chancellor of the Reich:

In view of the increasingly critical character of the situation, I propose to come to see you immediately, in order to try to find a peaceful solution. I shall come by airplane and am ready to set out tomorrow. Please indicate to me the earliest time and the place where you could receive me. I should be grateful if you would reply to me as quickly as possible.

Neville Chamberlain.

The Prime Minister takes this decision without consulting anyone. He informs the other members of his Government of it only the next morning. Did he fear, at the last minute, that he would not be followed? In that case, he was mistaken. His Cabinet colleagues warmly congratulate him and unanimously approve his initiative.

In Berlin, Ribbentrop and Göring cannot believe their ears. The Führer replies that he will be happy to receive the Prime Minister. Under the shock of emotion, he thinks of going to London himself, to spare him the fatigues of the journey. But very quickly he realizes that this is impossible. The meeting will therefore take place at Berchtesgaden, the next day, 15 September.

This dramatic turn of events overturns all Halder and Witzleben's projects. Their arms fall at their sides when they learn that Chamberlain is going to the Führer. They have been completely mistaken about the political situation because they have badly evaluated the balance of military forces. As regards England, they have not understood that her unreadiness obliged her to avoid war, if only not to be brought to the admission that she could not wage it. As regards France, they have not seen "that the

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
3. Göring exults because he favors peace; Ribbentrop because he sees in this gesture the sign that England will accept all the Reich's conditions.

4. Letter from Chamberlain to his sister, 19 September 1938. (Keith Feiling, op. cit., pp. 363–364.) Hitler will say so himself to the Prime Minister. "That reveals a side of his character," he will remark, "that would surprise many people among us." Strange as it may seem, the offer to come to London is

confirmed by Ward Price in Year of Reckoning, p. 253.

[[PDF page 387]]

same military institutions that had struck her with total inertia at the time of the Anschluss required her in September 1938 to abandon the Czechs." Finally, the conspirators' plan presented strange gaps. Halder himself had always affirmed that a coup de force needed, in order to succeed: 1. a clear and resolute direction; 2. the consent of the masses to follow the movement; 3. a skillful and precise choice of the moment to strike. Now none of these conditions is fulfilled.

There remains for the conspirators only to annul their putsch preparations as quickly as possible and erase every trace of them, so that no one can suspect their existence.

"What do you want us to do?" Halder will declare in a resigned tone. "Hitler has incredible luck! Everything succeeds for him..."

1. Charles de Gaulle, memorandum addressed on 26 January 1940 to Generals Gamelin, Weygand, and Georges, and to MM. Daladier and Reynaud, reproduced in Trois Études, Paris, 1945, p. 157.

2. As regards the direction of the action, Halder, Brauchitsch, and Witzleben pass the ball to one another and show themselves as irresolute as Lossow and Lüttwitz at the time of the Kapp putsch; as regards the adhesion of the masses, General von Witzleben believes that the attempt would have been smothered in the egg and that the troops would never have rebelled against a victorious Hitler; as regards the choice of the moment, it escapes the instigators of the plot since it depends: a) on Hitler's coming to Berlin; b) on the decision of a foreign Power over which they are not masters. "What actually happened, it seems," writes Wheeler-Bennett, who submitted this whole affair to a thorough examination, "is that the preparations for a putsch were not as advanced as the conspirators later claimed; or else that the said preparations had been established within a framework too rigid to be able to adapt to the demands of the moment." (Le Drame de l'Armée allemande, p. 359.)

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3. According to some, the affair was not called off until a few days later. But trustworthy witnesses assure us that it was postponed sine die as soon as Chamberlain's journey to Berchtesgaden was announced. (Wheeler-Bennett, op. cit., p. 358.)

4. To the question: "Would the conspirators have been sufficiently prepared or resolved to strike, in case M. Chamberlain had never gone to Berchtesgaden?", Sir John Wheeler-Bennett answers: "There is no proof of that, but only unsubstantial assertions." And M. François-Poncet, after examination of the documents: "These assertions deserve no credence."

[[PDF page 388]]

XIX

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN'S JOURNEY TO BERCHTESGADEN

(15 September 1938)

Such are the conditions in which, on the morning of 15 September, Neville Chamberlain, accompanied by Sir Horace Wilson, his principal adviser, and by M. William Strang, head of the Central Europe Department at the Foreign Office, flies toward Germany to try to save peace. He carries with him only a small suitcase and an umbrella. The weather is execrable, for it is the autumn equinox. It is raining. Visibility is very poor and the wind is blowing in gusts. Chamberlain is sixty-nine years old. It is the first time he has boarded an airplane. He does it to pay a visit to a man he has never yet seen, but of whom he knows in advance that he is not an easy interlocutor.

His Majesty's Prime Minister has few trumps in hand. But the previous evening he received messages of approval from Lord Baldwin as well as from the Governments of Australia and Canada. Finally, at the moment when his airplane was about to take off, a dispatch rider handed him this note from Éamon de Valera, president of the Irish State:

"When you receive these lines, you will have succeeded or failed. I write them to you simply so that you may know that at least one person is absolutely convinced that what you are doing is right — whatever the outcome. I believe that you will succeed. If that should not be the case, you will be blamed for having gone. But to stop halfway, that is to say

to refrain from performing an act carrying the slightest chance of success, would be a fault, given the stakes. If you fail, you will have no remorse. What any businessman would not hesitate to undertake, you are certainly entitled to do, you in whose hands rests at this moment the fate of millions of men who can do nothing for themselves. May God bless your efforts!"

On arriving above the Rhine valley, the aircraft is caught in a storm and badly shaken. Pushed by the wind, which is blowing at one hundred and twenty kilometers an hour, it is ahead of schedule and lands at Munich a little after noon. Chamberlain gets out, immediately greeted by Ribbentrop's stereotyped smile and by drum rolls.

On the road leading from the Oberwiesenfeld airfield to Munich station, the crowd massed in the rain acclaims the "messenger of peace," for the news of his coming had been broadcast that very morning by all the world's radio stations. The interpreter Schmidt has the impression that the welcome from the Munich population is warmer and more spontaneous than during Mussolini's visit. At the station, Chamberlain boards the special train that is to take him to Berchtesgaden.

During the journey, which lasts three hours, the British Premier can observe through the windows of his carriage a spectacle that symbolizes the situation of the moment in striking fashion. In all the villages the train crosses and at the level crossings, groups of young men and young girls greet him by crying: "Heil!" and stretching out their arms to him. But in the background, on the roads along which the railway line runs, a quantity of troops march toward the northeast, with their trucks, their weapons, and their new equipment. During a stop at Bad Reichenhall, an officer hands Ribbentrop a dispatch that the latter hastens to communicate to Chamberlain: it is the text of the proclamation that Konrad Henlein has just delivered on the radio and that contains the affirmation: "The Sudetens want to return to the

Reich.” It is the first time that the British Prime Minister has been placed before this demand.

[[PDF page 390]]

The last part of the journey is made by car, along a winding road that climbs the mountainside. After a clearing, the rain has begun to fall again. The sky darkens still more. Shreds of cloud, frayed by the wind, cling to the slopes of the Bavarian Alps. Finally, the automobiles stop before the Berghof. Hitler awaits his visitor halfway up the steps leading to the house. He has put on his dress uniform: brown tunic, black trousers, and black patent-leather shoes. On his left arm he wears a red armband with a swastika. After asking Chamberlain whether he has borne the fatigues of the journey well, he introduces him into the great salon, where tea is served. At first sight, Chamberlain is disappointed by Hitler’s physical appearance. He finds him insignificant and tells himself that he would not recognize him in the middle of a crowd.

After exchanging a few disconnected remarks on the respective dimensions of rooms in Germany and England — for Chamberlain has admired the size of his salon — Hitler asks him abruptly:

“What procedure do you propose? Do you wish two or three people to attend our interview?”

“If you see no objection,” replies Chamberlain, “I should prefer to speak to you tête-à-tête.”

Hitler having agreed, the Führer, the Prime Minister, and the interpreter Schmidt go up to the first floor. After following a gallery decorated with Italian Renaissance paintings and antique marbles, they enter Hitler’s private salon. It is a room of medium dimensions, devoid of any ornament, containing only a stove, three seats, a sofa, and a small table on which two bottles of mineral water are placed. It is there that Hitler and Cham-

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. We possess two accounts of this interview: that of the interpreter Paul Schmidt (Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne, pp. 394–399) and that of Keith Feiling (The Life of Neville Chamberlain, pp. 365–368), which is based on Chamberlain’s letter to his sister.

3. This scene was arranged in advance between State Secretary von Weizsäcker and Sir Nevile Henderson. Chamberlain indeed wishes to keep Ribbentrop out of the conversation, for he fears that his arrogance and his lack of tact may complicate things. (Cf. Erich Kordt, Nicht aus den Akten, p. 359.) The former Reich ambassador in London is ulcerated by it. One would say that Hitler wants to eliminate him from the Anglo-German negotiation. A month ago, he sent Wiedemann to London without informing him. Now he is dealing directly with Chamberlain outside his presence. He wonders whether this should not be seen as the beginning of a disgrace...

[[PDF page 391]]

berlain will converse for three hours. During this time Ribbentrop — who is beside himself with rage at being reduced to the rank of a utility player — will remain on the ground floor, in the company of Sir Horace Wilson and William Strang.

In a calm tone and without raising his voice, Hitler begins by enumerating all the grievances Germany has to formulate against her neighbors: he evokes in turn the Treaty of Versailles, the impotence of the League of Nations to resolve minority problems, the struggle for equality of rights, the rejection of his proposals for controlled rearmament, the economic barriers imposed on his country, the criticisms of the English press toward his regime, and finally the special relations that bind the Reich to the countries of southeastern Europe.

While he speaks, Chamberlain does not take his eyes off him. After letting him monologue for a long moment, he interrupts him to say, with a benevolent smile:

“I am ready to seek with you a solution to all these problems, provided that there is never any question of recourse to force...”

At these words, Hitler starts and suddenly straightens himself:

“Recourse to force?” he asks, raising his tone. “Who is speaking of recourse to force? It is M. Beneš who is using force against my compatriots of the Sudeten lands! It is M. Beneš who mobilized in May, and not I!”

Then, exciting himself more and more:

“I will not allow myself to be mocked like this any longer! In one way or another, I shall settle this question by a personal initiative, and in the shortest possible time!”

In one way or another? For the interpreter Schmidt, this formula resounds like an alarm signal. It indicates that one is approaching the dangerous zone, for in Hitler’s mouth it means: either you will grant me everything I demand, or it will be war.

Outside, the rain redoubles in intensity and the wind whistles

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Hitler is still under the effect of a letter from Konrad Henlein that was handed to him a few moments before Chamberlain’s arrival. The leader of the S.d.P., evoking the abuses of the Czechs, speaks of three hundred dead and suggests putting the following conditions to the British Premier: “No plebiscite; immediate retrocession to Germany of territories containing more than 50 percent Germans; occupation of these territories within twenty-four hours.” (Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, p. 489.)

around the house. Chamberlain, who until now has not departed from a grave and calm attitude, begins in his turn to show signs of nervousness.

“If I have understood you correctly,” he says, “you are determined, whatever happens, to attack Czechoslovakia?”

Hitler does not answer. After a few seconds of silence, Chamberlain adds:

“If that is your intention, why did you let me make the whole journey to come to Berchtesgaden? In that case, it would be better for me to leave immediately. Our interview no longer has any purpose.”

At that instant, war and peace hang by a thread. But the extraordinary happens: Hitler draws back a step.

“If you recognize that the Sudeten problem can be resolved on the basis of the right of peoples to dispose of themselves,” he resumes in a very calm tone and with a self-control that contrasts with the excitement he had shown a few moments earlier, “then nothing prevents us from examining at once the manner of translating this principle into acts.”

Will Chamberlain seize the ball on the rebound? Will he hasten to subscribe to the principle of self-determination, which is, after all, in conformity with British diplomacy? But no. Whether he has been irritated by the flash of temper shown by Hitler, or whether he is thinking of the difficulties that the application of this principle to Czechoslovakia may entail, he replies:

“If the application of this principle must be translated into the establishment of a plebiscite in the Sudeten lands, the difficulties will be enormous...”

But Hitler remains silent. Has the threat to break off the interview given him food for thought?

“Before giving you a formal reply on the question of self-determination, I must consult the members of my Cabinet,” Chamberlain adds. “I therefore propose that we interrupt our interview here, that I return immediately to London to report to my colleagues, and that we then have another meeting.”

A gleam of anxiety passes through Hitler’s eyes when he hears Chamberlain speak of an interruption of the conversations. But he appears reassured when the Prime Minister

[[PDF page 393]]

expresses his intention of coming back to see him. At once the atmosphere relaxes and the conversation continues in a more friendly climate. Very skillfully, Chamberlain profits from this lull to ask Hitler not to carry out, in the interval, any aggression against Czechoslovakia.

“I promise you,” Hitler replies without hesitation. “But,” he adds after a moment of reflection, “I could not keep this promise if new incidents were to alter the situation.”

The conversation ends on these words. At 8 p.m., Chamberlain takes leave of the Chancellor and goes back down to Berchtesgaden to spend the night there.

Once arrived at the Grand Hotel, the Prime Minister recounts in detail the twists and turns of his interview to Sir Horace Wilson and William Strang, joined by Sir Nevile Henderson, who had hastened from Berlin during the afternoon.

“I was right to come!” Chamberlain tells them. “The situation is much more critical than I had imagined.”

Meanwhile, and in accordance with usage, Schmidt, installed in an adjoining room, dictates an account of the meeting to a typist. Henderson comes from time to time to see whether the work is advancing, for Chamberlain is impatient to have it in his hands. He would like to study it during the night, so as to be able to speak about it to the other members of the Cabinet the next morning.

Suddenly, Ribbentrop bursts into the room.

“You still think you are at Geneva, where people were brothers and pigs together and where every secret document was handed over to anyone at all!” he cries, addressing Schmidt. “Understand that these methods no longer have currency in National Socialist Germany! These notes are reserved exclusively for the Führer. Take that as said!”

This is his way of taking revenge for his exclusion that afternoon. Schmidt must therefore assume the unpleasant task

[[PDF page 394]]

of going to tell Henderson and Chamberlain “that there will be no minutes.” When Chamberlain, surprised, asks him the reason, Schmidt replies:

“A written account would take away from the conversation its personal character as a man-to-man interview.”

But this argument does not convince the Prime Minister at all. He gets angry, stamps his foot, and energetically demands the minutes. Seeing that he will not obtain them, he finally declares:

“Since that is so, next time I shall bring my own interpreter, or at least someone who can take down the discussions in shorthand.”

The following morning, 16 September, Chamberlain leaves again for Munich by road. From there, his airplane brings him directly back to London. His absence has lasted no more than twenty-four hours.

On arriving at Downing Street, he finds on his table this message from Dino Grandi, Italian Ambassador in London:

“You have been humane, whereas classical diplomacy unfortunately too often loses contact with humanity. I wish you complete success in the task you have undertaken. Many difficulties still await you. But you have broken the spell, and millions of mothers, in Europe and throughout the world, bless you today.”

Ribbentrop and the Führer,” he writes, “that Hitler continued to think of the conquest of all Czechoslovakia and that he was absolutely certain, now, of attaining this goal with England’s implicit consent.” (Nicht aus den Akten, p. 259.)

[[PDF page 395]]

XX

THE CRISIS REACHES ITS CULMINATING POINT

(15–22 September 1938)

The same day, that is, Thursday 15 September, even before Chamberlain has returned from Berchtesgaden, Georges Bonnet has let London know “that his Government would support all the proposals the Prime Minister might make to Hitler concerning Czechoslovakia.” At the same time, he sends a message to M. de Lacroix, asking him to warn Beneš “that in case Germany resorted to war, it would not be easy for the French Government to have all opinion behind it if France were not attacked and if it did not have the certainty of having England at its side.” As for President Daladier — who still does not know how the Berghof conversations have unfolded — he asks Chamberlain to invite him to London, in order to take stock of the situation with him.

On the morning of the 16th, as soon as he returns to the British capital, Chamberlain assembles his Cabinet colleagues and reports his journey to them. He makes known to them the will expressed by Hitler to intervene by arms if the Sudeten problem were not rapidly settled on the basis of self-

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
4. Chamberlain is embarrassed by the absence of minutes. He insists in Berlin on obtaining a copy. Ribbentrop will end by sending him one on 19 September, because by that date the Reich Foreign Minister considers the Berchtesgaden conversations obsolete.

determination. Lord Runciman, who attends the deliberations in the capacity of expert, confirms his unfavorable opinion of the Czech Government, which he holds entirely responsible for the situation.

“Given the turn taken by events,” he affirms, “the attachment of the Sudetens seems to me inevitable. In these conditions, the wisest course is that the cession of their territories take place without discussion and in the shortest possible time.”

This language makes a lively impression on the members of the Cabinet. But how is this transfer to be carried out without resorting to a plebiscite? Up to now, Chamberlain has wanted to avoid this procedure, for he well realizes that it will be difficult not then to extend it to the other minorities, or even to the other countries of central Europe. Now he resigns himself to it, convinced that there is no way to do otherwise.

On 17 September, M. Beneš — still under the shock of Chamberlain’s journey to Berchtesgaden — judges that he can no longer maintain his previous positions and that he must let out some ballast. He summons M. de Lacroix and reveals to him in a confidential tone that he had already thought, during the negotiations of the Treaty of Versailles, of renouncing certain “salients” populated by a strong German majority. These are three territories of a total area of 8,000 square kilometers and comprising nearly one million Germans. One is situated at the northwestern corner of Bohemia (the Eger region); another in the northeast of the quadrilateral (the regions of Aussig and Reichenberg); the third along the

Silesian frontier, near the Glatz salient (the region of Troppau and Jägerndorf).

“The cession of these salients to the Reich,” he continues, “would perhaps be a means of resolving the problem without

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. The granting of autonomy within the framework of the Czech State, without any modification of frontiers.

3. Moreover, he is in disagreement with his Prime Minister, M. Milan Hodža, who accuses him of pursuing a policy incompatible with Czechoslovakia’s geographical situation. Now M. Hodža is the leader of the Agrarian Party, the most powerful element of the governmental coalition.

4. Beneš estimates that the German minority will thus be reduced to one and a half million and will no longer constitute a danger to the Czech State. As we shall see farther on, this figure, exact for Bohemia proper but inexact for the country as a whole, will turn against him. In reality, there will still remain about 2,300,000 Sudetens in Czechoslovakia.

[[PDF page 397]]

striking a mortal blow at the existence of the State, for they lie in front of our fortified line. Formerly, this operation would have been easy. Today it is different, for I would have the appearance of yielding to blackmail. In any case,” he adds, taking leave of the French minister, “I tell you all this only under the seal of secrecy and urgently beg you to speak of it to no one.” After which, he hastens to hold the same language to M. Newton.

Does he truly believe that Newton and Lacroix will respect the instruction? Does he not rather fear that, taking his recommendations to the letter, they might abstain from transmitting this “indication” to their chiefs?

One would be tempted to believe it, for the same day (17 September), as if to give more weight to his suggestion, M. Beneš dispatches to Paris M. Jaromír Nečas, Minister of Public Health, carrying a memorandum relating to this project and a map on which he himself has marked in red pencil the territories whose cession to the Reich could be envisaged. M. Nečas hands this document to Léon Blum, who immediately transmits it to Daladier. The latter is stupefied when he reads it. It is a memorandum of six typed, unsigned sheets, but bearing in the margin annotations in Beneš’s hand and ending with this autograph postscript: “I urgently beg you never to evoke this plan in public, for I would be obliged to deny it. Say nothing of it either to Osuský, for he would not agree.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Beneš omits to say that in 1919 he had fiercely opposed a proposal by Lloyd George tending to attach the regions of Asch, Eger, and Reichenberg to Germany.

2. In a letter addressed to M. de Lacroix on 20 January 1939, that is to say four months after Munich, Beneš will return to the confidential character of his communication and insist to the French minister that he never speak of it. On 16 March 1948, before the Commission of Inquiry of the National Assembly, Lacroix will complain bitterly that this secret had been violated. (Rapport, II, p. 266 ff.) One

is entitled to conclude from this that, even ten years later, M. de Lacroix was unaware of the mission that Beneš had entrusted the same day, and without warning him, to M. Nečas.

4. Through the intermediary of M. Blumel, former director of his cabinet. (Testimony of Léon Blum before the Commission of Inquiry of the National Assembly, 30 July 1947. Rapport, I, p. 256.)

5. “Reading this document,” writes Georges Bonnet, “Daladier raises his arms to heaven and exclaims: ‘Ah! If Beneš had negotiated with the Sudeten leaders in so broad a spirit, he would have succeeded!’” (Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 211.)

6. A few days after Munich, M. Daladier, accused of having “betrayed” Czecho-

[[PDF page 398]]

Then M. Nečas goes to London to make the same démarche at the Foreign Office. From then on, the heads of the French and British Governments are warned that Beneš is not irreducibly hostile to the principle of a cession of territories to the Reich. This fact will play a considerable role in the Franco-English conversations that will take place the next day. “Perhaps it would have been better,” Daladier will say melancholically in 1947, “if I had not received this document on the eve of my departure for London.” And, returning to this affair in 1961, he will add: “I was extremely surprised by this proposal. Would it not have been better, instead of temporizing for several months, to grant broad autonomy to the Germans of the Sudetenland within the framework of the State? If Beneš himself proposed to cede to the Reich nearly a million Germans, was that not opening the way to far more important demands? I certainly understood Beneš’s difficulties, the profound trouble that this proposal revealed. But how had he not foreseen its danger?”

Slovakia, will reply during a press conference: “Did I have the right to shed French blood to defend territories that the Czech Government itself was ready to renounce?” Indignant, M. Osuský will write to the President of the Council to protest against this assertion, which he considers insulting to his country. M. Daladier will then ask him to come to see him and will take from his drawer Beneš’s memorandum, transmitted by M. Nečas. M. Osuský will be thunderstruck when he reads it. He will be ulcerated by the lack of confidence betrayed by the terms of the postscript, and by the fact that Beneš had preferred to have this text delivered to the French Government by a special emissary rather than through the normal diplomatic channel.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Deposition before the Commission of Inquiry. Subsequently, the only reproach Blum will address to Daladier will be that he did not keep strictly to the line of demarcation fixed by Beneš.

2. Édouard Daladier, Munich, Le Nouveau Candide, 7–14 September 1961. This document will have for its author consequences still more disastrous than he could suppose. In June 1940, during the evacuation of Paris, the French Government will forget it at the Quai d'Orsay, where it will fall into German hands, who will send it to Berlin. In 1945, when the Russians in their turn enter Berlin, they will find it in the archives of the Wilhelmstrasse, from where they will send it to Moscow. Meanwhile Beneš, by his declarations and his writings, will have given himself the figure of a fierce resister, a champion of anti-Germanism “who would never have yielded an inch of the national territory to the Germans.” Stalin will let him talk until the day when, once again President of the Czechoslovak

Republic, Beneš shows inclinations toward independence with respect to the Kremlin. Stalin will then brandish this memorandum and threaten to publish it, which will ruin the legend of intransigence Beneš had forged for himself. Throughout the year 1947, the old companion of Thomas Masaryk will live under this blackmail, in an anguish further aggravated by two heart attacks and the evolution of the internal situation. The day Stalin formulates demands that exceed measure, Beneš will be driven to the drama of 1948. Jan Masaryk, Minister of Foreign Affairs, will throw himself from a window of the Hradčany (10 March). Beneš will resign (7 June) and will die, “heartbroken,” at Sezimovo-Ústí (3 September).

[[PDF page 399]]

On Sunday, 18 September, Daladier and Bonnet arrive at Downing Street, where they are welcomed by Chamberlain and Halifax. Their usual advisers have been joined by Sir John Simon and Sir Samuel Hoare. The Prime Minister begins by recounting his interview with Hitler.

“When I arrived at Berchtesgaden,” he declares, “I realized that the situation was much more serious than I had believed. The Führer is determined to make war to liberate the Sudetens and will consider himself satisfied only on the day when all the Germans of Czechoslovakia have been incorporated into the Reich. He bases himself on the free right of peoples to dispose of themselves, a principle that we can hardly challenge. Hitler intends to liberate the Sudetens by agreement or by force. If Beneš does not liberate them, he will go and liberate them himself. At the moment of our parting, he told me: ‘Everything now depends on the British Government...’”

Chamberlain reflects for a moment, then continues in these terms:

“If we reject this solution, the Chancellor will without any doubt reply by ordering his armies to invade Czechoslovakia. That is why I have finally rallied to the idea of a plebiscite that would be organized in the regions where the Germans won more than 50 percent of the votes in the recent municipal elections...”

“A plebiscite is unacceptable for Czechoslovakia as for France,” Daladier replies sharply, “for it would bring about the total disintegration of the Czech State. France has an interest in maintaining a Czechoslovakia as strong as possible. Moreover, we have signed treaties with this country that morality forbids us to disavow. It is an illusion to believe that Hitler will be content with the Sudetens, or even with all Czechoslovakia. What he aims at is nothing less than domination of the continent...”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Sir John Simon and Sir Samuel Hoare, respectively Chancellor of the Exchequer and Home Secretary, belong to the “inner Cabinet.” Since it is a matter of obtaining the definitive adhesion of the French Government to the English plan, Chamberlain has judged it useful to bring them in as reinforcement.

[[PDF page 400]]

“In any case,” Halifax insists, “it is practically impossible to save Czechoslovakia. There could only be a general war against the aggressor, and in the peace treaty that would end it, the frontiers of this State

would certainly not be drawn as they are today."

The discussion lasts throughout the afternoon. Daladier evokes the possibility of ceding without a plebiscite the "salients" mentioned by Beneš in his memorandum. But this project is quickly set aside as not corresponding to the situation. It is impossible to make Hitler accept the liberation of a fraction of the Sudetens, to the detriment of the others; impossible also to substitute a strategic frontier for the ethnic and linguistic frontier that he demands.

"In short," Halifax remarks, "a peaceful solution must be found for this problem that takes account both of the British desire to restore the Sudetens to the Reich and of the French desire not to fail in its obligations."

The problem is thus very well delimited; but formulated in these terms, it is insoluble. Yet the ministers present are so desirous of finding an outcome that they will finally succeed in doing so.

"Since Beneš already consents to restore one million Sudetens to the Reich," Daladier says to himself, "he will doubtless accept making broader concessions. We are not, all the same, going to run the risk of a world war in order to keep one and a half million Sudetens inside Czechoslovakia!" Chamberlain, for his part, thinks that since the Czech Government has been brought to accept the Runciman mission, to pretend to have requested his coming, and even to thank the English Government for its solicitude, it should be possible to repeat the same operation on a larger scale, by obliging it of its own accord to cede the Sudetens to the Reich. It will suffice for this to exert still stronger pressure on it. War will thus be avoided; the Democracies will save face, and France will not be obliged to keep its commitments.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. "For my part," Chamberlain will write to his sister the next day, 19 September, "it is absolutely indifferent to me whether the Sudetens are inside the Reich or outside it, according to their desire." (Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain, p. 367.)

2. As Sir Samuel Hoare will say to Barrington-Ward of The Times: "The principal concern of the London Government is to prevent the French from throwing upon the English the entire responsibility for the abandonment of Czechoslovakia, although they themselves have the greatest interest in having the question decided without war."

Daladier finally rallies to this point of view. But in return he asks: 1. that the new frontier be fixed by an international commission, with Czech participation; 2. that England — jointly with France — guarantee the new Czechoslovakia against any unprovoked aggression.

"Such a guarantee is contrary to British traditions," Chamberlain replies. "His Majesty's Government has always been reluctant to undertake commitments of this kind on the continent. It is therefore impossible for me to give you a formal answer without having consulted the members of the Cabinet."

As time is pressing and Daladier insists — for he would not wish to leave London without bringing back at least this guarantee — Chamberlain urgently convenes the Council. The British ministers meet in an adjacent room where they deliberate for two hours — two mortally long hours during which

Daladier and Bonnet sadly watch night invade a rather poor garden.

Finally Chamberlain and Halifax reappear. Their faces are smiling.

“In compensation for France’s acceptance of the cession of the Sudeten lands to the Reich,” declares the Prime Minister, “England consents to guarantee the frontiers of the new Czechoslovakia.”

“These words represent a great relief for us,” replies M. Daladier, “but as I have already told you, only the French Council of Ministers has the power to confirm the final agreement of the conference.”

Chamberlain cannot repress a gesture of discouragement. He believed everything settled, and now a new obstacle rises on his road. How much more time is to be lost

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. “In the isolation in which France found herself,” writes Daladier, “we resigned ourselves to the cession of the Sudetens, preferable to the plebiscite that all the minorities might have demanded.” (Nouveau Candide, 7–14 September 1961.)

2. Manifestly, the English ministers hesitate to take so grave a decision, which commits them more and more in central Europe. On the other hand, they consider it necessary to give the French some satisfactions in order to facilitate their rallying to the British plan.

[[PDF page 402]]

in tergiversations of this kind? But Daladier explains to him that he absolutely needs to be covered by the whole Cabinet in order to make French opinion accept so grave a decision.

“When can I have, at the earliest, a definitive answer?” Chamberlain asks him.

“I shall assemble the Council of Ministers tomorrow morning,” Daladier replies. “As soon as it has finished its deliberations, I shall inform you of the result, yes or no.”

Whereupon Daladier and Bonnet leave again for Paris. They have yielded on the essential point: the transfer of the Sudeten lands to the Reich. But they have nevertheless won three advantages: 1. they have had any idea of a plebiscite set aside; 2. they have obtained the English guarantee; 3. they have had it admitted that the delimitation of the new frontier should be the work of an international commission within which Czechoslovakia will be represented.

On Monday, 19 September, at 10 o’clock in the morning, the French Council of Ministers meets at the Élysée under the presidency of Albert Lebrun. Daladier first reports on Chamberlain’s journey to Berchtesgaden, then on the conference held the previous day in London. He depicts in a dramatic light France’s situation, her military unreadiness — especially in the field of aviation — and emphasizes the total isolation with which she would be threatened if she did not rally to the British solution. Mandel, Minister of Colonies, asks that the Franco-English plan not be communicated to Hitler before it has been accepted by the Czechs.

“That goes without saying,” Daladier replies.

“I take note of that, Monsieur le Président,” Mandel replies with a smile.

“And if the Czechs refuse?” asks Chautemps.

“In that case,” Bonnet replies, “we shall be obliged to interpret the Franco-Czech pact...”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Chamberlain has manifestly believed that the mere announcement of the British guarantee would suffice to sweep away the last obstacles. He suddenly realizes that this is not so. He is all the more surprised because he is convinced that he has saved France’s position, as much as England’s, and is astonished that the French do not appear grateful to him for it.

[[PDF page 403]]

The threat is clear. But since no one wants to envisage what would then happen, the ministers decide that it is premature to examine the question before the Czechs have provided their answer. After a short discussion, the Franco-English plan is accepted unanimously. President Lebrun raises the meeting at noon. At twelve minutes past noon, Daladier communicates this decision to London.

At 2 p.m. and 3 p.m., London and Paris hand to the Government in Prague two identical notes in which they notify it of their common decision:

I. The French and British Governments, having examined the report of the Prime Minister of Great Britain on his conversation with M. Hitler and the account of the mission accomplished by Lord Runciman, are both convinced that after recent events the point has now been reached where the further maintenance within the frontiers of the Czechoslovak State of the districts inhabited principally by the Sudeten Germans can no longer in fact be prolonged without endangering the interests of Czechoslovakia itself and those of European peace. In the light of these considerations, the two Governments have been constrained to conclude that the maintenance of peace and the safeguarding of the vital interests of Czechoslovakia can be effectively assured only if these districts are now transferred to the Reich.

II. This result could be reached either by a direct transfer or following a plebiscite. We are conscious of the difficulties involved in a plebiscite and are well acquainted with the objections you have already opposed to such a procedure, particularly as regards the possibility of far-reaching repercussions if the matter were to be treated on the basis of so broad a principle. For this reason, unless otherwise indicated, we suppose that you will prefer to treat the problem of the Sudeten Germans by the method of a direct transfer, and by considering the matter in itself.

III. The districts to be transferred would doubtless have to include the regions having more than 50 percent German inhabitants, but we have every reason to hope

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The communiqué, drafted by Albert Sarraut at the end of the meeting, states “that unanimously, the Council of Ministers gives its approval to the solutions proposed in agreement with the British Government.” (Daladier, id., ibid.)

[[PDF page 404]]

that by way of negotiation, under the direction of an international commission that would include a Czechoslovak representative, an adjustment of the frontiers can be obtained wherever it might be necessary. We are convinced that the transfer of less extensive districts on the basis of a higher percentage would not constitute a solution.

IV. The international body in question could also be charged with questions concerning a possible exchange of populations on the basis of a right of option within a determined time limit.

V. We recognize that if the Czechoslovak Government is disposed to accept the measures suggested, comprising material modifications to the conditions of the State, it is justified in asking for assurances for its future security.

VI. Consequently, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom would be ready, as a contribution to the pacification of Europe, to participate in an international guarantee of the new frontiers of the Czechoslovak State against unprovoked aggression. One of the principal conditions of this guarantee would be the safeguarding of the independence of the Czechoslovak State by the substitution of a general guarantee against any unprovoked aggression for the treaties currently in force.

VII. The French and British Governments both recognize the extent of the sacrifice thus asked of the Czechoslovak Government in the interest of peace. But precisely because this is a common interest of Europe in general and of Czechoslovakia in particular, they have judged it their duty frankly and jointly to set forth the essential conditions for safeguarding peace.

VIII. The Prime Minister must resume his conversations with M. Hitler on Wednesday at the latest and earlier if possible. We therefore consider that we must ask you to provide us with an answer as soon as possible.

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1. Allusion to the cession of "salients" envisaged in the memorandum delivered by M. Nečas.

2. Georges Bonnet, La Défense de la Paix, I, pp. 244–246, and Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 937, 956, 961. At the moment of handing this note to Beneš, Newton realizes that it excludes any claim by the Polish and Hungarian minorities and asks London whether this is indeed how he should interpret it. Halifax hastens to repair this gap by declaring "that the English guarantee in no way excludes a friendly treatment of the other minorities." Informed of this corrective, Bonnet declares that he gives his consent to it, but asks that this declaration be made only by the British minister. (Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 940, 946, 955.)

[[PDF page 405]]

Since Chamberlain intends to return to see Hitler the day after next, he adds to this note "supplementary instructions" that Lord Halifax immediately transmits to M. Newton:

“I wish to emphasize once more,” writes the head of the Foreign Office, “that it is indispensable that President Beneš give us his answer this evening, or at the latest tomorrow. The Prime Minister’s visit to Hitler cannot be deferred beyond Wednesday. He would find himself in a difficult position, and the situation might even become disastrous, if he were obliged to go there without having Prague’s answer.”

When Bonnet hands the text of the Franco-English note to Osuský, the latter becomes white as a sheet. Besieged by journalists when he leaves the Quai d’Orsay, the Czechoslovak minister in Paris confines himself to answering them:

“You have before you a man who has just been condemned to death, without having had the right to have his defense heard...”

The unanimity with which the Franco-English plan was adopted at the Council of Ministers of 19 September is surprising, when one knows to what degree minds are divided. If Daladier, Bonnet, Chautemps, Queuille, Monzie, Pomaret, and Marchandeau favor a policy of conciliation, Reynaud, Mandel, Campinchi, Jean Zay, de Chappedelaine, and Champetier de Ribes are hostile to it and do not conceal it. (The rest of the Cabinet hesitates and oscillates according to the wind.) How then can one explain the unity they have reached? The answer is simple: it is entirely façade. Some approved the Franco-English plan because they think it is the only way to save peace; the others because they are convinced Prague will reject it and that it will be war.

The same division manifests itself in all domains of public life. The line of demarcation between partisans

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1. Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 938. These “supplementary instructions,” which fix a very short delay for the answer, give the note the character of an ultimatum.

of peace and partisans of war passes through parties, unions, the press, and splits them from top to bottom. It shakes the most solid structures of the country: the Church, the University, the great corps of the State. The nearer the decision approaches, the more passions are exacerbated. The clash of opinions is translated into a whirlwind of articles, declarations, and contradictory positions.

A latent crisis smolders even within the Cabinet. Mandel, Reynaud, and Champetier de Ribes speak of resigning if Daladier allows Czechoslovakia to be touched. Whereupon Pomaret and de Monzie go to see the President of the Council to tell him that they will withdraw their confidence from him if he yields to the injunctions of the “war party.” With the exception of the Communist Party, which obeys Moscow’s instructions, all the parliamentary groups are torn apart. In the Socialist Party, Blum, Zyromsky, Rosenfeld, and Louis Lévy are for war; Maurice Paz, Paul Faure, L’Hévéder, Spinasse, and Adrien Marquet are for peace. In the Radical Party, Daladier, Bonnet, and de Monzie are for peace; Herriot, Mandel, Jacques Kayser, and Jean Zay are for war. The same tearing apart appears among the national parties, where Paul Reynaud, Louis Marin, and Henri de Kerillis are for war, while Pierre-Étienne Flandin, François Piétri, and Jean Montigny are for peace.

Thus the most unexpected alliances are formed. Blum feels more sympathy for Kerillis than for Paul Faure, and Montigny feels closer to Marquet than to Reynaud. Newspapers of the same party are seen openly supporting opposite theses. L'Humanité (Marcel Cachin), L'Époque (Kerillis), L'Ordre (Émile Buré), L'Europe nouvelle (Pertinax), L'Aube (Georges Bidault), and Le Populaire (Léon Blum) campaign for war. La République (Émile Roche), L'Intransigeant, Paris-Soir, Le Jour, Le Journal, Le Matin, L'Action française, Candide, Gringoire, and Je suis partout are for peace, while Le Figaro, always prudent, simultaneously publishes "bellicist" articles by Mauriac

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1. They will not do so, however. "If they had brought me their resignation," Daladier will say, "I would have accepted it."

2. "At present," Adrien Marquet cries during a meeting held at Bordeaux, "there is only one problem: are politicians of the party of peace or of the party of war?"

3. Cf. Jean Montigny, La France devra-t-elle faire la guerre pour la Tchécoslovaquie? Lettre ouverte à M. le Président de la République, Le Mans, 1938.

and Duhamel, and "conciliatory" editorials by Wladimir d'Ormesson.

In London too, the opposition stirs. Liberals and Labourites organize protest meetings, submerge the Government under a flood of petitions, and send delegations to Downing Street to summon Chamberlain to adopt a firmer line of conduct. Vansittart — Chamberlain's own brother-in-law — bustles about in the corridors of the Foreign Office. Eden, who is making a trip to the United States, condemns the Prime Minister's policy in severe terms. But it is unquestionably Churchill who is the most active. He protests and delivers a series of speeches in which he strives by every means to set English opinion against Chamberlain's Government and to persuade Beneš that he must not yield.

Since his bursts of voice do not have the success he had hoped for among his compatriots, he goes to Paris accompanied by Edward Spears, to speak with Herriot, Mandel, and Reynaud. With his customary impetuosity, he scolds some, encourages others, and distributes to all instructions for resistance, as though he were the true head of the French Government. He presses Mandel and Reynaud to drive Daladier and Bonnet from power and provoke a crisis by resigning. When Mandel points out to him that the Radical Party is very divided and that they risk being replaced by partisans of conciliation, Churchill says to them:

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1. See on this subject Georges Champeaux, La Croisade des Démocraties, I. Les Origines secrètes de la guerre de 1939–1945, Lectures françaises, June 1957; Geneviève Vallette and Jacques Bouillon, Munich 1938, Collection Kiosque, Les Faits, La Presse, L'Opinion; Henri Noguères, Munich ou la Drôle de Paix, Paris, 1963.

2. "I have always thought," he will write in his Memoirs, "that Beneš should have defended the fortified line. Once the battle had begun — that was at least my opinion at that time — France, in an impulse of national enthusiasm, would have gone to his aid and Great Britain would have rallied almost

entirely to France." (Step by Step, p. 281 ff.)

3. The Chamberlain Cabinet is solidly seated. Its policy is approved by the greater part of the nation.

4. The same man who will take General de Gaulle to London in his airplane on 17 June 1940.

5. "It is enough to leaf through Churchill's Memoirs," writes Bonnet, "to observe that — although he was only a leader of the opposition — Churchill considered himself in this period as Prime Minister of England... and of France." (Le Quai d'Orsay sous trois Républiques, p. 218.) On 21 September, Sir Eric Phipps writes to Lord Halifax: "I greatly fear that the two eminent members of the British Parliament who are currently in Paris are giving very bad advice to M. Osuský and to certain French politicians." (Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 100.)

[[PDF page 408]]

"Then remain within the Cabinet in order to torpedo its initiatives!"

Stimulated by Churchill's "tonic" advice, Mandel picks up his telephone and calls Beneš in Prague:

"You are at the head of a free and independent nation," he tells him. "Neither Paris nor London has to dictate your conduct to you. If your territory comes to be violated, you must not hesitate for one second to give the order to your army, which is ready for it, to defend your fatherland. In doing so, you will save Europe from Hitlerism, for I can tell you that if you fire the first cannon shot, its echo will reverberate through the world in such a way that the cannons of France, of England, and also those of Soviet Russia will go off in their turn, and all by themselves. You will be followed by everyone, and Germany will be beaten in six months without Mussolini, and in three months with Mussolini."

After which, he puts down his receiver with a worried air, for Beneš's replies have seemed dilatory to him. Is the President of the Czechoslovak Republic resigned to the worst? Is he recoiling before the idea of facing a conflict?

After a moment, the Minister of Colonies takes up his telephone again and calls Paul Reynaud. He tells him of the conversation he has just had with Prague and concludes with these words:

"Despite everything, I still have the hope that Beneš will listen to me rather than to Georges Bonnet!"

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. In his Memoirs, Churchill evokes this journey to Paris, but draws a modest veil over the nature of his conversations. "At the height of the crisis," he writes, "I went to spend two days in Paris, to see Reynaud and Mandel, who were in deep distress and on the point of resigning. This was not, in my opinion, the thing to do, for their sacrifice could no longer alter the course of events, and the loss of these two men, the most resolute and capable, could only weaken the French Government. I ventured to let them know my opinion. After this painful visit, I returned to London." (La Seconde Guerre mondiale, L'Orage approche, I, 1, p. 369.) On Churchill's journey to Paris, see also Fabre-Luce, Histoire secrète de la Conciliation de Munich, p. 56 ff.; André Simon (Otto Katz), J'accuse! The Man who betrayed France, p. 192. The latter assures us that "a large number of French parliamentarians and ministers visited Osuský that day to incite him to resistance."

2. It goes without saying that this conversation, and many others, are recorded by the German listening services, the Paris-Prague telephone cable crossing Reich territory from end to end. “I have all the records,” Hitler will say a week later to Daladier. (Cf. Pierre Dominique, Après Munich: Veux-tu vivre ou mourir? p. 14 ff.; Georges Suarez and Guy Laborde, Agonie de la Paix, 1935–1939, p. 103, note 1.)

3. Robert Bollack, “Au moment de Munich, Mandel et Churchill étaient d'accord pour engager Beneš à la résistance.” (L'Intransigeant, 9–10 May 1948.)

[[PDF page 409]]

Meanwhile, the leaders of the Reich have not remained inactive. Fully exploiting the incidents that occurred in the Sudeten lands during the preceding days, the German newspapers appear on 16, 17, and 18 September with the following headlines:

Terrible atrocities by the Czech bandits. — This criminal State must disappear forever. — Bestial abuses by the Czechs at Krumau. — A veritable manhunt is being organized at Eger. — Testimony to the bloody terror unleashed by the Czechs: 23,000 Sudetens take refuge in Germany. — Heart-rending scenes at the frontier of Bohemia. — The Communists and the Hussites work hand in hand.

On 20 September, the tone rises still further:

Pregnant women are trampled and shot down by the soldiery. — Women and children are crushed by assault tanks! — The blood of the victims cries for vengeance! — This cannot go on like this!

These sensational headlines rest on very little. But, made to heat minds white-hot, they succeed all the more easily because no one can verify their accuracy. In fact, the Sudeten districts are more or less calm. Two or three summary executions and several hundred arrests have succeeded in smothering the beginning of insurrection. The only incidents reported there are due to the flight of a large number of Germans, among whom this news has provoked a movement of panic and who are trying to cross the frontier to reach the Reich.

But Hitler is not content with words: he must also have acts. As early as 17 September, Henlein launches from Saxony a new proclamation:

“Observing that the Czech Government has lost control of the situation and that it lets its soldiery commit bloody excesses against a defenseless population, I announce

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3. They were invented, for the most part, by Alfred Ingemar Berndt, one of Goebbels’s assistants at the Ministry of Propaganda. The foreign diplomats accredited in Prague will protest against the outrageous character of these headlines, “which harm the credit of the German press.” (Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, 502, 513–516, 520, 545.)

[[PDF page 410]]

the formation of a Sudeten Free Corps, in which I invite all refugees aged eighteen to fifty to enroll."

The aim of this Free Corps will be "to deliver the territory of the Fatherland" and to cooperate with the invading army. At the end of forty-eight hours, its effectives amount to 40,000 men divided into eight Standarten, or regiments, having their barracks at Dresden, Zwickau, Zittau, Bautzen, Meissen, Chemnitz, Plauen, and Leipzig. Their Chief of Staff is Hans Krebs, the former leader of the D.N.S.A.P., who has taken refuge in Germany since 1933.

Very quickly, armed detachments of this Legion undertake punitive expeditions along the frontier, so that on 26 September Henlein will be able to publish this victory communiqué: "The Sudeten Free Corps has captured 1,500 prisoners and 25 Czech machine-guns. It has inflicted severe losses on the enemy terrorists."

On 19 September, Sebekovsky, deputy of the S.d.P., addresses an inflamed harangue to groups of Sudetens who have taken refuge in Dresden, which all the Reich transmitters immediately rebroadcast: "Do not lose courage!" he cries. "The hour of your deliverance approaches. What the Germanic emperors undertook a thousand years ago, Adolf Hitler will complete!" Simultaneously, Henlein makes contact with the Slovak autonomists and pushes them to demand their independence with the utmost energy. Since the Czech authorities have arrested a certain number of Sudeten activists, the Reich police arrest 150 Czech nationals settled in Germany and announce that, if the executions continue, these will serve as hostages. Thus, from day to day, the situation deteriorates and the German-Czech antagonism takes on a sharper character.

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2. This legion is formed of Sudetens who have deserted the Czechoslovak army and who, for one reason or another, have come to settle in Germany. They are framed and reinforced by German S.A. and S.S. The members of the Free Corps are provided with weapons taken from the stocks of the Austrian Army. They wear a special uniform composed of black boots, black breeches, and a gray shirt. (Le Temps, 16 August 1938.)

4. Documents of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, XXV. P.S. 388, 482. On the activity of the Sudeten Free Corps, see Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, 550, 558, 566, 567.

While the German press lets itself loose and the threats of war multiply, Hitler watches the international situation from the height of the Berghof terrace. He is more or less assured of Mussolini's support. Not that the latter is pushing toward war: on the contrary. The problems of central Europe interest him infinitely less than those of the Mediterranean basin. Around Easter, he had even caressed the hope of reconciling himself with England, which would have allowed him to pursue his projects of expansion in Africa and in the Balkans. But the contemptuous hostility of France and the delays introduced by the Foreign Office in the application of the agreement of 16 April have made him lose patience. Moreover, he is intent on maintaining the role of "protector" that he has assumed with respect to Hungary, and for that he must support the claims of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. Thus he had a very sharp reaction when, on the evening of Hitler's speech of 12 September at Nuremberg, England asked him to exercise a moderating action upon the Führer.

“This is the last straw!” he cries. “To address such a request to me after all the insults they have made me undergo! This folly proves that the English have completely lost their heads!”

The next day, 13 September, he comments on the Nuremberg speech in L'Informazione diplomatica. “This speech,”

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1. Mussolini, who would like to escape a too close military alliance with Germany, seeks to counterbalance the “vertical” policy of the Axis by a “horizontal” policy: constitution of a “Latin bloc” (Spain-France-Italy); maintenance of his influence in the Danubian basin (Italo-Hungarian agreements); extension of his influence in the Balkans (Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece). For that, he needs England’s neutrality.

2. It is not long since Paul-Boncour called him a “Carnival Caesar.” Moreover, French opinion is sensitized by Italian pretensions over Nice, Corsica, and Tunisia.

3. When Chamberlain wanted to relax relations between England and Mussolini and had his services draw up a note for the Italian Government, he found it “drafted in terms that would have chilled a polar bear.”

5. Ciano, Journal, 12 September 1938. The same day, Mussolini charged Ciano with letting Hitler know that “if he desired, at this moment, an intervention in his favor, he was ready to go a step further than in his previous declarations.” (Id., ibid.)

6. The unofficial organ of the Palazzo Chigi, where Mussolini quite often publishes unsigned articles.

he declares, “brings an important contribution to peace, in the sense that it clarifies the Sudeten problem and demonstrates that it can be settled only on the basis of self-determination.” On the 15th, he addresses an open, anonymous letter to Lord Runciman in which he advises him “to organize plebiscites everywhere, before war breaks out through the fault of a crocodile State, a State that has the repugnant form of an intestine.”

On the 18th, the Duce delivers a great speech at Trieste. His language is firmer and more categorical than that which he used in the preceding days. He demands plebiscites for all the minorities of the Czechoslovak State, emphasizes the necessity of resolving the problem by peaceful means, but adds that if war is inevitable, it must remain localized.

“If it should not remain so,” he continues in a threatening tone, “let it be known that Italy has already chosen her place in it!”

After which the Duce raises his tone, while the crowd answers him with increasingly sustained acclamations:

“Formerly we marched on Rome. In the following years, our march began from Rome. This march is

not yet finished and no one will stop it! Are you ready to fight?"

"Subito! Subito!" cries the crowd.

"Our adversaries beyond the Alps, who still cling to outworn ideologies, do not know us. They do not know us because they are too stupid to be dangerous. They are a quarter-century behind us. During this quarter-century, Italy has strengthened herself through four wars. That is proof that we shall also win the next four! That is why at Geneva fifty-two States rose up against us, under the presidency of the present head of the Czechoslovak Republic..."

At this moment, Mussolini is interrupted by a gust of whistling.

"Your whistles will be heard in the world!"

The crowd's reaction confirms him in his decision:

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3. The Tripolitanian war, the First World War, the Abyssinian campaign, and the war in Spain.

[[PDF page 413]]

"If the conflict remains circumscribed to Berlin, Prague, Paris, and Moscow, I shall remain neutral," he had declared the previous day to Ciano. "But if England intervenes to generalize the conflict and give it an ideological character, then we shall throw ourselves into it. Italy and Fascism cannot remain neutral!"

For Hitler, each of the Duce's speeches is proof of loyalty, and proof of gratuitous loyalty, since he asks nothing of him. All that remains is for him to secure the cooperation of Hungary and Poland, for his politico-military apparatus to be definitively in place.

On 20 September, a Hungarian delegation composed of M. Imrédy, President of the Council, M. de Kánya, Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. Pataky, Secretary of State, and General Keresztes-Fischer, Chief of the General Staff, arrives at Berchtesgaden. Hitler receives it in the presence of Ribbentrop.

"Hungary has far too wavering an attitude in this period of crisis," Hitler says in a severe tone to M. Imrédy. "It is time for her to take sides! For my part, I have decided to resolve the Czech question, even if it must be at the price of a world war. Germany claims the totality of the German territories. I am convinced that France and England will not march. If Hungary wants to benefit from the operation, she has not an instant to lose,

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1. Mussolini then speaks at Udine (20 September), at Belluno and Padua (24 September), at Vicenza (25 September), and at Verona (26 September). Each time he resumes the same arguments. (Monatshefte für Auswärtige Politik, October 1938, p. 965 ff. See also: Verhandlungen zur Lösung der Sudetendeutschen Frage, p. 14.)

3. Hitler sent his personal airplane to Budapest to fetch it. The day before, Ciano had an interview with

Imrédy. “I shall tell [the Hungarians and the Poles] to show themselves more active,” he notes in his Diary under the date of 19 September. “It is not useful for Germany to be the only one to draw all the benefits from the present situation.” The same day, M. Woermann, director of Political Affairs at the Wilhelmstrasse, drafts a note for Hitler in which he tells him: “Although we are above all interested in the fate of the Sudetens and of the rest of Czechoslovakia, we must not leave exclusively to others [Italy and England] the task of defending the Polish and Hungarian claims. Just as Mussolini, in his Trieste speech, expressed his solidarity with these countries, we too should find a means of supporting the aspirations of Poland and Hungary.” (Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, 536.)

4. According to M. Gaston Maugras, French minister in Budapest, Hitler is said to have told the Hungarian delegation: “To obtain, one must ask. Why are you silent? Under no circumstance will I leave your country without support.” (Georges Bonnet, La Défense de la Paix, I, p. 255.)

[[PDF page 414]]

without which I shall no longer be in a position to defend her interests. It would be preferable, in my opinion, for Czechoslovakia to be crushed. It is impossible to tolerate any longer the presence of this aircraft carrier in the heart of Europe. Let Hungary begin by demanding a plebiscite in the territories she claims. Then let her refuse to give her guarantee to the new frontiers of Czechoslovakia. The Czech question will be settled in three weeks at the latest. When I see Chamberlain again, I shall set forth the German point of view to him without circumlocution. All things considered, the best way to proceed would be military action. But one danger remains: namely, that the Czechs accept all my conditions.”

The Hungarians are astonished by the haste shown by the head of the Third Reich. They have the impression that Hitler wants to use the Sudetens as Russia used the Serbs in 1914. Moreover, a military adventure seems very risky to them because of the few armaments available to the Honvéd. They withdraw, promising to do everything possible...

Hardly has the Hungarian delegation left the Berghof when the Chief of Protocol introduces M. Lipski, the Polish Ambassador in Berlin.

After the usual greetings, the Chancellor begins by enumerating to him his grievances against Czechoslovakia. Then he comes to speak of the visit Chamberlain paid him at Berchtesgaden on 15 September.

“It seems that the announcement of this visit at first disconcerted him,” Lipski writes in the account of the interview that he drafts for Colonel Beck, “but he obviously could not dispense with receiving the Prime Minister. He believed that he was coming to notify him, in a solemn manner, that England was ready to resort to arms. In which case he would have answered him that he had already taken that into account in his forecasts. Then he declared to me

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2. Account by E. Kordt, drafted on the basis of a telephone communication from Berchtesgaden. (Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, 554.) This conversation is capital. It shows that Hitler considered the acceptance of his conditions by the Czechs “as a danger (Gefahr).” Those who were striving, in Paris and London, to incite the Czech Government to reject the Franco-English plan were therefore — unbeknownst to them — working in the direction desired by Hitler.

[[PDF page 415]]

that no peaceful solution existed except the cession of all German territories to the Reich. However, an armed occupation of the Sudeten territories would have seemed to him a clearer and more radical solution.

“The Chancellor then assured me that in case all his conditions were accepted, he could not oppose a peaceful settlement — if only out of regard for his own public opinion — even if a part of the Czech problem remained pending. That is why he wonders, if this eventuality comes about, how to settle the parts of the problem concerning Hungary and Poland.”

M. Lipski then specifies to Hitler the desiderata of his Government. They consist: 1. in the recovery of the territory of Teschen; 2. in the creation of a common Polish-Hungarian frontier, which could be obtained by the attachment of Ruthenia to Hungary.

“In pursuing the analysis of the tactics to be followed,” continues M. Lipski, “the Chancellor declared to me: 1. if his proposals are rejected by Chamberlain, the situation will be clear and, as he has warned him, he will proceed by arms to the incorporation of the Sudetens; 2. if his proposals are accepted and if he is asked to give guarantees, he will maintain that these guarantees can be given by Germany only if Poland, Hungary, and Italy do the same... It seems obvious to him that Poland and Hungary will not be able to give these guarantees before the problem of their minorities has been resolved... 3. The Chancellor told me in strict confidence, but authorizing me to make appropriate use of his remarks, that he had declared, this very day, that in case a conflict broke out between Poland and Czechoslovakia over Teschen, the Reich would be at our side... However, the Chancellor advises us to begin our action only when his troops have occupied the Sudeten mountains, for the duration of the operation will thereby be shortened by that much.

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2. Lipski bases this claim “on the necessity of erecting a more solid barrier against Russian expansion.” A year later — that is to say in 1939 — the Poles will justify their Munich policy by saying that they had been constrained to act as they had done “because the Western Powers had not understood in time that the establishment of a common Polish-Hungarian frontier was the best possible barrier against German expansion.” (Boris Celovsky, Das Münchener Abkommen, p. 390, note 1; Florian Sokolow, Poland's Policy, Nineteenth Century and After, p. 537 ff.)

[[PDF page 416]]

“In the continuation of the interview, the Chancellor emphasized with energy that Poland was a factor of the first importance, protecting Europe against Russia. It also emerges from his various declarations: a) that he has no intention of going beyond the Sudeten territory, but that he will certainly do so in case of war [...]; e) that after the settlement of the Sudeten question, he will raise the colonial problem; f) that he was thinking of settling the Jewish problem, in agreement with Poland, Hungary, and perhaps also Romania, by transferring them into a colony. To which I replied that if he found a satisfactory solution to this problem, we would erect a superb monument to him in Warsaw.”

To finish, Hitler gives the Polish ambassador the assurance that the German-Polish frontier will never give rise to an armed conflict and that he is simply thinking of a highway through the Danzig corridor.

These conversations are not long in bearing fruit. As soon as the next day, 21 September, Colonel Beck sends three notes to Paris, London, and Prague. In the first two, he draws the Western Powers' attention to Poland's territorial claims. In the note to Prague, he brutally denounces the Polish-Czech arbitration treaty of 1925. Paris and London protest in Warsaw, but their opinions no longer carry much weight there. "Does France therefore not understand," the Kurjer Warszawski answers insolently, "that it is not in her interest to strengthen Germany to the detriment of Czechoslovakia if Poland is not also strengthened?"

As for the Hungarian Government, on 22 September it sends a note to the Government in Prague demanding that the Hungarian minority be made the object of treatment analogous to that of the German minority.

And at once violent anti-Czech demonstrations

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1. Let us recall that Colonel Beck has already raised this question before Yvon Delbos. (See above, p. 217.) Madagascar was then in question.

2. Naturally he informs the German Government of it. (Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, 553; Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 997; Krofta: Z dob, p. 337.)

3. Kurjer Warszawski, 22 September 1938. Since 18 September, the Polish press, and notably Gazeta Polska, Polska Zbrojna, and Express Poranny, have published leading articles demanding "the reparation of the theft of Teschen, committed by the Czechs in 1919."

[[PDF page 417]]

break out at Kattowitz, in other Polish cities, and throughout Hungary. In Warsaw, the crowd marches through the streets crying: "Long live Hitler!" In Budapest, it does the same while brandishing placards demanding the attachment of southern Slovakia. These demonstrations indicate that the hour of the quarry is approaching...

The French and English notes were handed to Beneš on Monday, 19 September, at the beginning of the afternoon. Reading them, the President of the Czechoslovak Republic entered into a state of great agitation.

"So then," he cried, "Czechoslovakia is being abandoned!"

He drew M. Newton's attention to the insufficiency of the guarantees promised, adding that as the head of a constitutional State it was impossible for him alone to take a decision that committed the life of the country and that he was going to assemble the Council of Ministers.

Then begins a period of fifty hours that counts among the most dramatic in the whole history of Czechoslovakia.

Toward 2 p.m., the Czechoslovak ministers shut themselves up at the Hradčany, and throughout the afternoon of the 19th there is complete silence. Nothing leaks from their deliberations.

This silence continues throughout the night of the 19th to the 20th and during the following morning. Anxiety grows in London and Paris. In Prague, M. de Lacroix is in uncertainty.

Toward 10:30, the Polish ambassador has himself announced at the Quai d'Orsay.

"I brought you a note the day before yesterday," M. Lukasiewicz declares to Georges Bonnet, "by which my Government categorically demands that a plebiscite be organized for the Polish minority of Czechoslovakia, in case one is organized for the German minority. I should like to know what action you have taken on this request..."

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, 560; Ripka, op. cit., p. 116. The same day, the Hungarian parties of Czechoslovakia vote a resolution declaring: "We want to take our destiny into our own hands, in application of the right of peoples to dispose of themselves."

3. At 1 p.m. by M. Newton and at 2 p.m. by M. de Lacroix (Central European time).

4. "I have nevertheless the impression," writes Newton, "that he is more inclined toward acceptance than toward refusal and that he seeks, above all, a means of justifying this acceptance in the eyes of his people." (Boris Celovsky, Das Münchener Abkommen, p. 358.)

[[PDF page 418]]

"None," Bonnet replies curtly. "We did not wish to broach the problem. We were unanimous in finding your initiative very inopportune in the present circumstances. Do not complicate a dangerous situation by presenting a claim that, because of the slight importance of the Polish minority, cannot be placed on the same level as the Sudeten question. The risk of war has not been set aside. Wait for the hour of a peaceful negotiation!"

"Nothing can save Czechoslovakia any longer," M. Lukasiewicz retorts haughtily. "In these conditions, it is in France's own interest that Poland profit from the circumstances to recover the territories that the Czechs tore from her while she was defending Europe against the Bolsheviks. A greater Poland, allied with the Baltic States, with Hungary, and with Romania, would be for you, in the east, a precious auxiliary. She would be powerful enough to face up to her German neighbor as well as to her Russian neighbor!"

But Bonnet has too many worries in his head to linger over these chimeras. He informs M. Léon Noël, French ambassador in Warsaw, of this deplorable interview. Noël immediately asks Colonel Beck for an audience in order to know what credence to accord to M. Lukasiewicz's remarks. Alas! The head of the Polish Government confirms, while aggravating them, the declarations of his ambassador:

"M. Beck," Léon Noël cables to Paris, "told me that his Government remained faithful to its line of conduct and confined itself to following the course of events. When autonomy was in question in

Czechoslovakia, he asked for autonomy for the Poles. A plebiscite has been spoken of; he demanded a plebiscite for them. A rectification of frontiers is now being envisaged: Poland asks to benefit from it.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. On 18 September, a few hours before his departure for London, M. Lukasiewicz handed M. Bonnet a note categorically demanding the organization of a plebiscite for the Polish minority [of the Teschen district]. Failing which, a grave tension would result between Poland and Czechoslovakia. The English Government received the same warning. “This pretension of Poland,” writes Georges Bonnet, “brought a new argument to our thesis, which consisted in having England set aside the solution of the plebiscite.” (La Défense de la Paix, I, p. 256.)

2. Bonnet is all the more disgusted by it because it was for having made Litvinov understand that France would not denounce the Franco-Polish pact that the Franco-Russian negotiations came to nothing. (See above, p. 345.)

[[PDF page 419]]

“From M. Beck’s remarks, but still more from his tone, his attitude, and even his reticences,” concludes the French ambassador, “there emerged for me the impression that the Polish Government was very seriously envisaging proceeding to military action in the Teschen region.”

This hardly improves matters. To complicate them still further, the Hungarian minister in Paris has himself announced shortly afterward and informs Georges Bonnet that his Government fully associates itself with the démarche just made by the Polish ambassador concerning Teschen, and that it formulates identical claims in the name of the Hungarian minorities.

“The two countries,” he says, “are resolved to liberate the Hungarian and Polish populations subjected to the Czechs and have agreed to undertake common action.”

The French Minister of Foreign Affairs needs solid nerves to resist these assaults without losing patience. All the more because he is still without news from Prague and wonders what this means.

Toward 1:30 p.m., a message from M. de Lacroix is finally brought to him, drafted on the basis of the first information he has been able to gather:

“The Czechoslovak Government,” he says, “seems to hesitate between two solutions: either acceptance in principle of the Franco-British plan with certain reservations; or recourse to the arbitration treaty signed between Germany and Czechoslovakia.”

He immediately has a reply sent to M. de Lacroix that recourse to the German-Czech arbitration treaty would be madness. But he has scarcely finished drafting his message when Sir Eric Phipps arrives at the Quai d’Orsay.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
3. This is the arbitration convention concluded on 16 October 1926 between Germany and Czechoslovakia, which has never been denounced by the Reich Government. (See above, p. 213, note 7, and p. 220.)

[[PDF page 420]]

“According to the information sent to me by my Government,” he says to Bonnet, “thirty German divisions, among them numerous armored and motorized divisions, are concentrated on the Czechoslovak frontier.”

“We have received the same information from François-Poncet,” Bonnet replies. “Our ambassador in Berlin insists on the gravity of the situation.”

“What then are the Czechs doing?”

“I have just learned this instant that they are hesitating between recourse to arbitration and acceptance of the plan. I have charged M. de Lacroix with informing Beneš that the first solution would be madness, for it would mean war, and that he had no other path than acceptance. Ask M. Newton to make a similar démarche immediately, for I expect the Czech answer toward 3 p.m.”

But at 3 p.m., Bonnet still has nothing...

At 7:30 p.m., a new message from Lacroix is brought to him:

“A person who may be well informed tells me that the answer to be handed to us presently would be, if not negative, at least inspired by an idea of delay. People would be speculating on the fall of the French Cabinet... This person indicates that, according to his informant, a very clear appeal addressed directly by General Gamelin to General Krejčí would be the most effective. This appeal would explain why the full and immediate acceptance of the Franco-English proposal is indispensable.”

Bonnet communicates the contents of this telegram to Daladier, but both agree to give it no follow-up.

Then once again there is complete silence. Several times Daladier, Sir Eric Phipps, and various political personalities

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. In his report to London, Sir Eric Phipps has Bonnet say: “I have just learned from Osuský...” It seems rather that Bonnet is referring to Lacroix’s very recent message. (Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 967.)

3. At 5:30 p.m., Newton lets London know that he has made the requested démarche.

7. Id., ibid. “We consider,” writes Bonnet, “that the Government cannot ask the generalissimo [Gamelin] to take a political responsibility in our place.”

[[PDF page 421]]

telephone Bonnet anxiously to know what answer has been given by the Czechs. He can only answer:

“I still know nothing...”

At 8:30 p.m., Bonnet begins to become nervous. He sends for Sir Eric Phipps and suggests that he make a joint démarche with him to M. Beneš:

“We should inform him,” he says to the Ambassador of England, “that unless his answer is pure and simple acceptance, France and Great Britain will lose interest in the fate of Czechoslovakia in case she is attacked by Germany.”

But this démarche will not take place. For at 8 p.m., M. Krofta, Minister of Foreign Affairs, hands MM. Newton and de Lacroix the reply of the Czech Government. It is a refusal.

“The Franco-British plan,” he tells them, “is not of a nature to save peace. It was established without consulting the Czechoslovak Government. It violates the Constitution of the Republic and gravely harms the strategic and economic interests of the country. Moreover, all the Germans of the Sudetenland are far from desiring their attachment to the Reich. The guarantee proposed by the great Powers should make it possible to find another solution, which would not impose an unacceptable sacrifice on Czechoslovakia. The Czech Government considers that it is still possible to settle the Sudeten problem inside the frontiers. It judges it preferable, for that, to have recourse to the German-Czech arbitration treaty of 16 October 1926, which is still in force. It undertakes, from now on, to accept its award. This would be a rapid procedure, compatible with the honor and dignity of all the Powers concerned. Consequently, the Czech Government appeals to the French and British Governments to ask them kindly to reconsider the question.”

What is to be done? Chamberlain must go the next day to Hitler bearing an affirmative answer, otherwise it will be war. Now Paris and London have only a few hours before them to bring the Czech Government

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Boris Celovsky, op. cit., p. 360. Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 981, 986, 987. Bonnet, La Défense de la Paix, I, p. 247.

[[PDF page 422]]

to modify its point of view. This seems impossible...

However, toward 9:30 p.m., Bonnet is called to the telephone by M. de Lacroix.

“I have just transmitted to you a reply from the Czechoslovak Government requesting the application of the arbitration treaty,” he tells him. “Do not consider it definitive. M. Hodža, the Czechoslovak President of the Council, has just called me to make a new, very important proposal, of which I report to you by a telegram that you are going to receive incessantly.”

Bonnet immediately asks Daladier to come and join him at the Quai d’Orsay. After a short wait, that is to say at 9:50 p.m., de Lacroix’s second telegram arrives on the minister’s table. It is altogether different from the previous message. Here is what it contains:

“The President of the Council has just summoned me. In agreement with the President of the Republic, he declared to me that if I came this very night to declare to M. Beneš that in case of war between Germany and Czechoslovakia over the Sudeten Germans, France, because of her commitments with England, would not march, the President of the Republic would take note of this declaration. The President of the Council would immediately convene the Cabinet, all the members of which were from now on in agreement with the President of the Republic and with himself to bow...

“The Czechoslovak leaders need this cover in order to accept the Franco-English proposal. They are sure of the army, whose leaders have declared that a conflict alone with

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. According to M. de Lacroix, this telegram was amputated of its preamble, drafted as follows: “M. Hodža asked me if I was certain that France would shirk in case of conflict. I replied to him that I knew nothing about it and proposed to him to telegraph immediately to Paris to have a firm answer. He objected that this démarche would take too long and added: ‘I admit a priori that France will not march. If you can, this very night, obtain from your Government a telegram confirming it, the President of the Republic will bow. It is the only way to save peace.’” — “Now,” continues M. de Lacroix, “in examining the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I observed that my telegram had been amputated of M. Hodža’s first question and of my doubtful answer... I consider that the mutilation of my telegram is a heavy charge against the French Government, for it seems to indicate that, without wishing to admit it, it was not resolved to keep its commitments.” (Declaration by Lacroix in 1948 before the Commission of Inquiry, Rapport, II, 268.) M. de Lacroix’s argument appears specious. The absence of the preamble in question changes nothing in the meaning of the telegram reproduced by Georges Bonnet in La Défense de la Paix, I, p. 248.

Germany would be suicide. M. Hodža declares that the démarche he suggests is the only means of saving peace.

“He desires everything to be finished before midnight if possible, or in any case during the night. The President of the Council will make the same communication to the English minister.”

A few moments later, Daladier enters Georges Bonnet’s office, where M. Léger, Secretary-General of the Ministry, and M. Jules Henry, director of the minister’s cabinet, are already assembled. The four men confer on the reply to be made to M. de Lacroix’s telegram. They consider that they cannot refuse M. Hodža the cover he needs vis-à-vis his public opinion. Bonnet insists to Daladier that he convene the Council of Ministers — if only to avoid later complications. Daladier too considers that this would be desirable. But how is it to be done? There is a material impossibility of assembling the Council: the President of the Republic is at Rambouillet and several ministers are absent from Paris. How much time will be needed to reach the others? Moreover, the reply must be given very quickly, if possible before midnight: now it is past 11 o’clock. During this discussion, Bonnet is called to the telephone twice. It is Prague calling to know whether the French reply is ready.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. “I have very good reasons to believe,” M. Newton telephones Lord Halifax fifteen minutes later, “that the answer handed to me by the Minister of Foreign Affairs [Krofta] should not be considered

definitive. A solution must nevertheless be imposed on the Czechoslovak Government, for without pressure of this kind its members are too committed to be able to accept what they nevertheless know to be necessary. If I can hand President Beneš on Wednesday, 21 September, a sort of ultimatum, he himself and his Government will feel able to bow before force majeure. My French colleague is telegraphing in the same sense to Paris." (Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 979.)

"It is certain," writes Georges Bonnet for his part, "that the Czechoslovak Government does not want to have the appearance of making to Berlin, of its own free will, concessions that its public opinion judges excessive. It takes an official attitude that consists in asking for the application of the arbitration treaty with Germany. But at the same time it is not unaware of the extreme gravity of the situation, which the consulted Army chiefs [Krejčí and Syrový] have themselves recognized. It is a matter of avoiding 'the suicide of Czechoslovakia.' It is therefore ready, in reality, to accept a compromise; but the game consists in secretly asking France and England to exert pressure on it, which will thus justify, in the eyes of its public opinion, acceptance of the Franco-English plan and leave us all the responsibility for it." (La Défense de la Paix, I, p. 248.) Subsequently, Beneš will protest with indignation against "the infamous allegation according to which he had asked Paris and London to exert pressure on him, to provide him with cover with respect to his public opinion." Letter from Beneš to M. de Lacroix, 20 January 1939; Beneš, Mnichovské dny, 7 a.

HISTORY OF THE GERMAN ARMY, V: THE TRIALS OF STRENGTH (1938)
Benoist-Méchin

English translation — Section 9 of 10
PDF pages 424–474
Translation note: rapid, accuracy-focused translation from the corrected embedded text layer. No new OCR was performed. Page markers from the source text are preserved.

[[PDF page 424]]

"Hurry," he was told. "The Czechoslovak Government is waiting for it impatiently."

Daladier, Léger, Jules Henry, and Bonnet therefore began drafting the text. Each sentence was weighed, discussed, and corrected. Finally the instructions were ready:

"France," they said, "in agreement with England, has set up the only procedure that it judged, in fact, in the present circumstances, capable of preventing the entry of the Germans into Czechoslovakia. By rejecting the Franco-British proposal, the Czech Government assumes responsibility for bringing about recourse to force by Germany. By that very fact it breaks the Franco-British solidarity that has just been established, and at the same time removes all practical effectiveness from French assistance... Czechoslovakia is therefore assuming a risk from which we are conscious of having rescued it. It must itself understand the conclusions that France has the right to draw from this, if the Czechoslovak Government does not immediately accept the Franco-British proposal."

Before telephoning this message to Prague, Daladier and Bonnet considered it necessary to notify the President of the Republic. Bonnet therefore called M. Lebrun at Rambouillet and apologized for waking him at such a late hour. He explained the situation to him and read to him in turn the telegram received from Prague and the reply that the French Government proposed to make to it.

“It is very unfortunate to have to make such hasty decisions,” remarked M. Lebrun, “but since you tell me that there is no other way, I give you my agreement.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Daladier and Bonnet wanted neither to denounce the Franco-Czech pact nor to declare openly “that France would not march,” for fear that England would seize on this argument to justify its own abstention and throw responsibility for the affair onto France. The French reply would therefore be centered on the ineffectiveness of French intervention because of England’s refusal to join in it.

2. Bonnet links this reply to the fact that the Czechoslovak Government had already been informed of this several times, especially on 16 July. (La Défense de la Paix, I, p. 249.) At the same time, London sends Prague the following reply: “The Franco-British plan is the only means of preventing a German attack that appears imminent... If, after a fresh examination of the situation, the Czech Government believes itself bound to reject our proposal, it will naturally be free to take all the measures that it considers appropriate to meet the resulting situation.” “It was scarcely possible,” notes Boris Celovsky, “to state more clearly that England was disinterested in the subsequent fate of Czechoslovakia.” (Das Münchener Abkommen, p. 370.)

[[PDF page 425]]

At 12:30 a.m., the instructions were handed to M. de Lacroix.

“Let them guide you in the conversation you are to have with M. Hodža,” Georges Bonnet told him, “but do not leave him any note: confine yourself to replying verbally.”

At 1:30 a.m., Sir Eric Phipps brought to the Quai d’Orsay the text of the British reply.

“If Prague maintains its request to resort to the German-Czechoslovak arbitration treaty,” declared the British ambassador, “a second visit by the British Prime Minister to M. Hitler will no longer serve any purpose. That is why the British Government has asked the Czechoslovak Government to think seriously, and at once, before events occur for which it would have to decline all responsibility.”

On 21 September, toward two in the morning, the ministers of France and England brought the Czechoslovak Government the reply it had requested. It at once met as a Council of Ministers. The meeting was dramatic. Some ministers wept. Despite the extreme urgency, they could not make up their minds. There too, the “hard” clan opposed the “soft” clan. Despite the exhortations of M. Hodža, who was himself under strong pressure from M. Beran, M. Beneš suddenly seemed less resolved to bow. The deliberations continued until six in the morning.

Contrary to all expectation, no telegram from Prague reached the Quai d’Orsay. In Paris, as in London, nerves were stretched to the utmost. Finally, at 12:30 p.m., M. de Lacroix telephoned Georges Bonnet to inform him of the situation.

“The Czechoslovak Government is no longer in the same state of mind as last night,” declared the French minister. “Positions have hardened. Following telephone calls received during the night, it judges that the French Government will be obliged to modify its position under the pressure of parliamentary opinion and may even be forced to resign. In these conditions, it wants to wait a few

more hours before giving a definitive answer.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The secretary-general of the Czech Agrarian Party, of which M. Hodža is president.

2. This is the result of Mandel's telephone calls. Beneš believes that Daladier is going to be replaced by Herriot, Bonnet by Reynaud, and that France's policy will be completely changed. He therefore has an interest in delaying his reply.

[[PDF page 426]]

It will no doubt ask that your communication be handed to it in writing, as the British minister has done."

"Agreed," Bonnet replied, "but make it quite clear that our reply was made at M. Hodža's request."

At the beginning of the afternoon, Sir Eric Phipps personally telephoned Bonnet to say:

"The British Government is very disturbed by Prague's silence, when only last night it was pressing the French and British Governments to give it a reply before midnight. Why such haste, if it was not to take a position immediately? This delay is incomprehensible! It is said to be due to a rumor spreading in the Czechoslovak capital of a possible resignation by the French Government. In any case, London has no intention of changing its attitude. If need be, M. Newton will make a fresh démarche in order to affirm this once again to MM. Beneš and Hodža!"

But this intervention would not be necessary. At five o'clock, M. Krofta summoned the ministers of France and England to hand them the definitive reply of the Czech Government. Here it is:

"Forced by circumstances and by the extremely pressing urgings to which it has been subjected, and following the communication of the French and British Governments of 21 September 1938, in which the two Governments expressed their view concerning assistance to Czechoslovakia if it refused to accept the Franco-British proposals and, because of that, were attacked by Germany, the Czechoslovak Government accepts the French and British proposals with feelings of sorrow, assuming that the two Governments will do everything possible to have them applied with full safeguards for the vital interests of the Czechoslovak State.

"It notes with regret that these proposals were drawn up without consultation with the Czechoslovak Government. Deeply regretting that its arbitration proposal was not retained, it accepts them as a whole, emphasizing the principle of the guarantee as formulated in the note, and assuming

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. It goes without saying that this possibility worried the British Government. Alerted by Phipps, Chamberlain saw in it an after-effect of Churchill's trip to Paris. In fact, during the evening of the 21st, Mandel, Reynaud, and Champetier de Ribes came to see Daladier to ask him for explanations: "Is it true that France exerted pressure on Beneš? Is this not a new maneuver by Bonnet?" Daladier showed them de Lacroix's telegram. "Yes, there was pressure, but it was solicited." Disconcerted, the three ministers withdrew without saying anything. (Cf. Bonnet, La Défense de la Paix, I, 252.)

[[PDF page 427]]

that the two Governments will not tolerate the German invasion of Czechoslovak territory, which will remain Czechoslovak until the transfer of the territory—after the fixing of the new frontier by the International Commission mentioned in the proposals—can be carried out. It is of the opinion that the Franco-British proposal assumes that all details concerning the practical realization of the Franco-British proposals will be fixed by common agreement with the Czechoslovak Government."

Despite the considerations with which it surrounds itself, and despite its rather heavy style, reflecting the dramatic atmosphere in which it was drafted, this reply is an acceptance of the Franco-British plan. After the fifty hours of tension they have just lived through, Bonnet and Halifax breathe a sigh of relief. Czechoslovakia will be amputated of 25,000 square kilometers, three million inhabitants, and—what is more serious—its fortified zone and most of its industrial districts. Certainly, the tribute is heavy. Less heavy, however, than a second world war...

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. This version, transmitted by Newton to London, is the only authentic one. (Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 1005.)

[[PDF page 428]]

XXI
THE GODESBERG MEETING
(22–24 September 1938)

Chamberlain had already had to delay his departure for Germany by twenty-four hours because of the time taken by the Czechs to accept the Franco-British plan. He did not leave Heston aerodrome until 22 September, at ten o'clock in the morning.

"A peaceful solution of the Czechoslovak question is the preliminary condition for a genuine understanding between the English and German peoples," he told journalists as he boarded his aircraft, "and that understanding, in turn, is indispensable to the consolidation of peace. European peace is my essential goal. I hope this journey will open the way to it."

This time, Hitler had decided to come halfway, in order to reduce his visitor's fatigue by that much. The place he had chosen for this second meeting was Godesberg, a small town on the left bank of the Rhine, a few kilometers south of Bonn.

The aircraft carrying the British Prime Minister landed at Cologne at 12:30. Chamberlain got out and was immediately received by Ribbentrop's stereotyped smile and by rolls of drums.

The Reich Foreign Minister conducted the head of the British Government and his party to the Hotel Petersberg, on the right bank of the river, where apartments had

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The Prime Minister wrote to Hitler during the night of 20–21 September to ask him to postpone their meeting until the following day.

[[PDF page 429]]

been reserved for them. Hitler had installed himself on the opposite bank, at the Hotel Dreesen, from which he had flown during the night of 30 June 1934 to strike down Röhm and the rebel SA leaders. Between the two lay the immense flow of the Rhine, about four hundred meters wide at this point, bordered by villages and vineyards gilded by the sun of a fine late-summer afternoon.

At four o'clock, Chamberlain crossed the river and arrived at Godesberg. Hitler awaited him on the threshold of the hotel. With a pleasant smile, he asked whether his trip had gone well and whether he was satisfied with his accommodation. Then he led him to the first floor of the hotel and brought him into the conference room. It was a large, rather bare room, like those in which boards of directors meet. It was furnished with a long table surrounded by chairs and covered with a green cloth. A large bay window lit it, through which one could see the ruins of the castle where the Emperor Julian and Theodoric had camped in succession. But none of those present paid the slightest attention to these historical memories.

The small group sat down at one end of the table and the discussion began immediately. Chamberlain, who had not forgotten the incident over the minutes, had brought Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick with him to serve as his translator. Since Paul Schmidt, the Führer's interpreter, was also present, four pairs of eyes, instead of three, would record the scene.

Chamberlain spoke first in order to inform the Chancellor of the talks he had had in London.

"You will certainly remember," he said, "that before leaving Berchtesgaden I promised you to consult my Cabinet colleagues on the possibility of applying the right of self-determination to the Sudeten Germans. The British Government quickly declared itself in agreement with this principle. The French ministers, who came to London at my invitation,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Chamberlain was accompanied by Sir Horace Wilson and Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick. Sir Nevile Henderson had come to join them.

4. There are several accounts of this meeting: that of Sir Nevile Henderson (Failure of a Mission, Berlin, 1937–1939, p. 154 ff.), that of Paul Schmidt (Statist auf Diplomatischer Bühne, p. 389 ff.), that of Weizsäcker (Erinnerungen, p. 185 ff.), and finally that of Kircher (Frankfurter Zeitung, 23–24 September 1938). We have followed Paul Schmidt's, which is both the most complete and the most vivid.

[[PDF page 430]]

also gave their adherence. Finally, I obtained the assent of the Czech Government. With the French ministers I have drawn up a plan concerning the transfer to Germany of the territories in which the Sudeten Germans are in the majority. It provides, down to the smallest details, for the modalities of the cession and even for the tracing of the new frontiers."

Chamberlain then explained how he saw matters: his project included a complicated system of census-

taking, control, and population exchange that would require rather long delays. Finally, he evoked the guarantee that England and France would give to the new frontiers of Czechoslovakia and asked the Chancellor to conclude, in the name of the Reich, a non-aggression pact with Prague.

Having finished his presentation, Chamberlain settled back in his armchair, as if to enjoy Hitler's response more fully. His face radiated satisfaction. It seemed to say: "Admit that I have done fine work during these five days!"

"I am sorry, Mr. Chamberlain," Hitler replied, in an almost saddened tone, "but that will not do at all. After the events of these last days, there are things there to which I can no longer agree..."

Chamberlain immediately sat up straight. The blood rose to his face. He was at once stunned by this refusal and indignant to see his efforts so poorly rewarded. Flashes of anger passed through his eyes.

"I do not understand you!" he replied in a cutting tone. "How can you dare say that this will not do, after all the trouble I have taken to make prevail the solution that you yourself advocated at Berchtesgaden?"

Hitler dodged the blow. He asserted that it was impossible for him to sign a non-aggression pact with Czechoslovakia so long as the Polish and Hungarian claims had not been satisfied. Then he criticized—still in a composed voice—the details of the system proposed by Chamberlain.

"All this is much too long and much too complicated," he declared. "The occupation of the Sudeten territories must take place immediately."

"That is an entirely new demand!" Chamberlain protested. "It goes much further than any of those you formulated at Berchtesgaden!"

[[PDF page 431]]

But Hitler maintained his positions. He continued to demand the immediate occupation of the German territories. As he spoke, he grew heated. The tone rose. His attacks on Beneš and the Czechs became more and more violent. Meanwhile, Chamberlain withdrew into himself.

"The oppression suffered by the Sudeten Germans and the regime of terror that Beneš inflicts on them," Hitler continued in a hoarse voice, "forbid any delay. I cannot tolerate the continuation of this situation..."

He then explained to Chamberlain how he, for his part, envisaged the settlement of the problem: his plan amounted to an unconditional capitulation of Czechoslovakia.

Chamberlain refused to continue the discussion. He showed signs of increasingly sharp displeasure and withdrew across the Rhine to his hotel, the Petersberg. This first day ended in total disagreement. "The only ray of light," Schmidt writes, "is that a new session was planned for the following morning and that, in response to the formally expressed wish of Chamberlain, Hitler undertook to do nothing against Czechoslovakia so long as negotiations continued."

What reasons led Hitler to harden his position in relation to the demands he had formulated at

Berchtesgaden? They are numerous and varied, but all are discernible.

First, he in no way believed that Chamberlain was inspired solely by disinterested love of peace. That sentiment might serve him as justification, but he was deluding himself: England and France would never act as they were doing if they were sufficiently armed to stand up to him.

The fact that France and England were not in a position to make war in no way obliged him to renounce it himself. On the contrary. His goal was to crush Czechoslovakia, or at least to weaken it to such a degree that it would be at his mercy. Why should he abstain from doing so? Out of respect for some “international morality”? Was it more moral to maintain at any price the Czechoslovak State, which had violated

[[PDF page 432]]

all the promises it had made concerning its minorities? All that was only a residue of the Treaty of Versailles, that heap of iniquities imposed on Germany at a time when she was not in a position to defend herself. And this was the peace that they wanted to forbid him to transgress? What was he doing, in the end, other than carrying out the wishes of the National Assembly of Frankfurt in 1848 and of the Constituent Assembly of Weimar in 1919? What the Czechs considered a painful amputation appeared to Hitler as the restoration of the natural order and the reparation of an injustice to which the Western Powers had resigned themselves only reluctantly. They had spoken successively of “concessions of detail,” then “autonomy,” then “frontier rectification,” then “return to the Reich,” as international tension increased. Did they sincerely believe that the fate of the Sudeten Germans could be settled without touching the status of the other minorities? In that case, too bad for them: they now had to look reality in the face...

“This may lead to war,” people told him. But that prospect did not frighten him in the least. The idea that peace is “moral” in itself and that war is not is a prejudice dear to aging democracies. A man like him, who considered all the history of human communities as a merciless struggle to secure a place in the sun and who saw in combat not only a daily necessity but the exaltation of all that is best in man, was not going to allow himself to be hindered by considerations of that kind.

But he was not acting blindly, without knowing where he was going. Since 21 September at 11:25 a.m., he had known that the Czechs had accepted the Franco-British plan. His listening services had intercepted most of the telephone messages exchanged between Paris and Prague. He was aware of the instructions sent by Bonnet to Lacroix, but also of the counsels of resistance given by Mandel to Beneš. He was more convinced than ever that France and England would not move. But he also knew that the Czech Government expected that, in the hours to come, the Daladier Government would be forced to resign

[[PDF page 433]]

and that the political situation would be overturned from top to bottom. That was one of the reasons why he accelerated the movement and demanded immediate occupation of the Sudeten territories.

But it was not the only one. Even if he wanted to retreat now, he could no longer do so. Since Mussolini had demanded plebiscites for all the minorities included in the Czechoslovak State, he could

not fail to demand them too without appearing to lag behind the Roman dictator. That would amount to leaving him the privilege of defending—and making triumph—the claims of the Hungarian and Polish minorities.

All these motives pushed him to raise his stake. In doing so, was he running an enormous risk? Not even that. Either his demands would be rejected, and Czechoslovakia would be crushed in less than a week; or they would be accepted, and he would obtain everything he wanted without firing a single shot.

But no one, however powerful, is alone in the world, and things often happen otherwise than one had foreseen.

The next morning, 23 September, instead of coming to Godesberg as had been agreed, Chamberlain sent Hitler a written message. In it he refuted all the proposals that the Führer had formulated the day before and concluded with these words:

“You do not seem to have clearly understood that it is impossible for me to sponsor a plan unless I am certain that public opinion in England, France, and the whole world will consider it an application of the principles on which we have already agreed, which consist in settling the problem in an orderly way and without resorting to force... If, as you propose, German troops invade the Sudeten territory, there will be no other course left to the Czech Government than to order its forces to resist by arms. This is a point on which I have not the slightest doubt.”

The letter, which began with the formula “My dear Reichskanzler,” nevertheless maintained a conciliatory tone.

[[PDF page 434]]

Yet it burst like a bomb in the German camp. At the Hotel Dreesen, lively discussions began between Hitler and Ribbentrop, and between Ribbentrop and his advisers. In the end, Hitler dictated a reply to Chamberlain’s letter. In it he fully confirmed all his positions:

“When you tell me, Excellency, that the transfer to the Reich of the Sudeten territories is recognized in principle, I must unfortunately reply that a theoretical recognition of the same kind has already been given to Germany in the past. Remember Wilson’s Fourteen Points, which were outrageously violated! What interests me, Excellency, is not the recognition of principles, but only their realization, so that the martyrdom of the Sudeten Germans, victims of Czech tyranny, may come to an end, and in a way that takes account of the dignity of a Great Power...”

The text continued in the same style over five large typewritten sheets. Since it was too late to prepare an English translation, Schmidt was charged with bringing it himself to Chamberlain and translating it to him orally.

Meanwhile, nervousness was increasing in the European capitals, for it was soon learned that the negotiations were blocked. Journalists from every country came running for news. A denser and denser crowd massed on the riverbanks, its eyes fixed on the ferry used to transport the delegations. But the ferry remained motionless. Nothing passed from one bank to the other, and it was an astonishing sight to see the anxious crowd training its binoculars in turn on the hotel topped by a swastika flag, where the

Chancellor of the Reich had installed himself, and on the one where the British Prime Minister resided, over which the Union Jack was flying.

Toward three o'clock, the ferry finally set itself in motion. It carried M. Schmidt, the Führer's interpreter, who held a large brown envelope under his arm. A long murmur rose from the crowd, transformed by distance and wind into a sigh. What did the envelope contain? Was it a message of peace or a declaration of war? All eyes converged on the motionless man crossing the Rhine on his little craft. It looked like Charon's boat carrying

[[PDF page 435]]

the souls of the dead from the land of the living to the kingdom of the dead...

When Schmidt arrived at the Petersberg, he was assailed by a pack of journalists waiting for him on the hotel steps. He had to force his way through their crowd to reach Chamberlain's sitting room.

The Prime Minister received him in the presence of Sir Horace Wilson and Sir Nevile Henderson. He took the letter from Schmidt's hands and passed it to Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick to translate it for him. Reading and translation took some time. When Schmidt, who had remained to provide a few supplementary explanations, went back down into the hall, he was literally assailed by the press correspondents, who subjected him to a rolling fire of anguished questions:

"What is happening at the Hotel Dreesen?" — "Are they angry or not?" — "Will negotiations resume?" — "Is there still a glimmer of hope?"

Schmidt, still frozen in impenetrable silence, reached his boat and crossed the Rhine again, while the distant rumble of the crowd mingled with the murmur of the river.

As soon as he arrived at Godesberg, he was ushered in to Hitler. The Chancellor came toward him, his face anxious:

"Well," he asked, "what did he answer? How did he react to my message?"

Hitler seemed reassured when Schmidt told him that the British Prime Minister had not departed from his calm and had told him that he himself would reply in writing before the end of the day. Indeed, a second letter from Chamberlain arrived an hour later. It could not have been more benevolent. "I am prepared," he said, "to transmit to the Czechoslovak Government, as mediator, the proposals that Your Excellency made to me yesterday and that you maintain in full. I therefore ask you kindly to formulate them in writing, in the form of a memorandum. As soon as I am in possession of this document, I shall return to London in order to prepare my mediation there." It had also been agreed between Chamberlain and Ribbentrop that the Prime Minister would himself come to Godesberg to receive the Memorandum from the Führer's hands.

[[PDF page 436]]

Toward 10:15 p.m., the ferry again shuttled between the Petersberg and the Hotel Dreesen. But now the riverbanks were deserted. The crowd, weary of waiting, had dispersed into the night.

The English delegation was present in full. It was immediately brought, no longer into the conference room, but into the hotel's small ballroom, because on the German side the number of those present had increased too. Besides Ribbentrop, there were State Secretary von Weizsäcker, the head of the Wilhelmstrasse legal services, and several aides-de-camp.

The session opened a little before eleven o'clock. From the first words, the disagreement between the two delegations broke out with such violence that this confrontation would be by far the most dramatic of all.

First, Hitler asked Schmidt to translate into English the Memorandum he had prepared at the Prime Minister's request. It was a relatively brief document:

MEMORANDUM

The rumors that are multiplying from hour to hour concerning incidents that have occurred in Sudeten territory indicate that the situation has become quite intolerable for the Sudeten Germans and that, consequently, it is endangering the peace of Europe. It is therefore essential that the cession of territory agreed to by Czechoslovakia be carried out without further delay.

On the attached map, the German Sudeten region that is to be ceded is colored red. In addition to the territories to be occupied, the regions that are to be subject to a plebiscite are indicated and colored green.

The final demarcation of the frontier must correspond to the wishes of those concerned. For this purpose, German troops will occupy the region shown on the attached map as German territory, without regard to the fact that a plebiscite may give, in this or that part of the region, a Czech majority. The Czech armies will occupy the Czech territory, without regard to the fact that, in that region, there may

[[PDF page 437]]

[Map / graphic text omitted in the source OCR.]

[[PDF page 438]]

be strong enclaves inhabited by German populations whose majority, during the plebiscite, will manifest their German national sentiments.

In order to arrive at an immediate and definitive solution of the German-Czech problem, the German Government formulates the following proposals:

I. The withdrawal from the territories to be evacuated (shown in red on the attached map) of all Czech armed forces, police, gendarmerie, customs officers, and frontier guards must begin on 26 September at eight o'clock in the morning. These territories will be handed over to Germany on 28 September at the same hour.

II. The evacuated territory will be ceded in its present condition (see supplementary details in the appendix).

III. The Czechoslovak Government will immediately discharge all Sudeten Germans serving in the military forces or the police anywhere in the territory of the Czech State and will permit them to return to their homes.

IV. The Czechoslovak Government will free all political prisoners of German origin.

V. The German Government agrees to permit a plebiscite to be held no later than 25 November in the territories marked in green, which will be delimited more precisely. A German-Czech Commission or an international Commission will settle the modifications to be made to the frontiers as a result of the said plebiscite.

The plebiscite will be held on the basis of the situation existing on 28 October 1918. (Provisions concerning the organization of the plebiscite follow.)

APPENDIX

The evacuated German Sudeten region must be ceded without military, economic, or commercial establishments (factories) being destroyed or rendered unusable in any way. This includes the infrastructure of air services and all wireless stations.

All equipment of the economic and commercial services,

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1. That is, on the last day of existence of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, on the eve of the proclamation of Czechoslovak independence. (See above, p. 112 ff.)

[[PDF page 439]]

especially the rolling stock of the railways in the designated region, must be ceded in good condition. The same applies to public utilities (gas works, power stations, etc.).

Finally, no foodstuffs, merchandise, animals, raw materials, etc., shall be removed from this region.

This reading produced a disastrous effect on the English.

“But this is an ultimatum!” Chamberlain cried. “You are using the language of a victor dictating his conditions to a vanquished enemy!”

“It is a real Diktat!” Henderson added.

“It is impossible for me to transmit such a document to the Czech Government,” Chamberlain declared, at the height of agitation. “Its content, and still more its tone, will provoke a general outcry and will be rejected with indignation by public opinion, even that of neutral countries! I observe with boundless sadness and disappointment, Mr. Chancellor, that you are not helping me in any way in the efforts I am making to safeguard peace!”

Hitler seemed taken aback by the violence of the English reaction. Reduced to the defensive, he replied in an embarrassed tone:

“But it is not an ultimatum, it is a memorandum! The word Memorandum is written at the head of the text...”

This pitiful answer prompted Chamberlain, Wilson, and Henderson to resume their attacks:

“Your plan is doomed to certain failure, if only because of the shortness of the time prescribed for evacuation. You leave the Czechs only forty-eight hours to give the necessary orders, and the whole of the territories must be evacuated in four days! Think for a moment of the frightful risks of the operation! Bloody collisions will not fail to occur. There will be clashes between Czech and German troops. A European war will inevitably follow.”

Hitler said nothing: the discussion was deadlocked.

At that moment, one of Hitler’s aides-de-camp entered the room and handed the Führer a small sheet of paper. Hitler read it and handed it to Schmidt.

“Please read this message to M. Chamberlain,” he said in a flat voice.

[[PDF page 440]]

Schmidt immediately translated:

“President Beneš has just given by radio the order for general mobilization to all the Czechoslovak armed forces.”

A deathly silence fell over those present. It was so total that one could have heard a pin drop. “Now everything is over,” Schmidt said to himself. “War is inevitable.” And each of those present seemed to have the same thought. Hitler had pledged not to undertake anything against Czechoslovakia, but he had always added: “unless a new element comes to modify the situation.” Moreover, in his Nuremberg speech, alluding to the partial mobilization decreed by Beneš on 20 May, he had declared publicly: “I shall not hesitate to strike if such a provocation is repeated!”

The silence continued. Everyone held his breath. Chamberlain seemed petrified. All eyes were now fixed on Hitler.

After a moment that seemed interminable, Hitler said in a voice so low that one could scarcely hear him:

“Despite this unheard-of provocation, I maintain my promise to undertake nothing against Czechoslovakia so long as negotiations are under way, or at least so long, Mr. Chamberlain, as you are on German territory.”

These words slightly relaxed the kind of nervous rigidity that had seized everyone before the imminence of catastrophe. The conversation resumed, but in a muted tone. Hitler declared himself

ready to discuss the question of delays, which Chamberlain had asserted to be the principal stumbling block.

“Out of consideration for you, Mr. Chamberlain, I am prepared to extend the evacuation deadlines. You are the first man to whom I have ever made a concession. I agree to postpone the final date of evacuation to 1 October,” he said, and he corrected the text of the Memorandum accordingly. Then he accepted a few more modifications of detail, concerning form more than substance. After that, the text was sent to the secretariat to be put into final form.

From that moment, the discussion took on a livelier character.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. This order was in fact given on 23 September at 10:50 p.m.

[[PDF page 441]]

It was as though the announcement of the Czech mobilization had purified the atmosphere...

“I have made a far more important contribution to your efforts in favor of peace than you suspect,” Hitler told Chamberlain. “The zones whose cession I am demanding are much less extensive than those I would have taken if I had made war.”

In the end, Chamberlain agreed to transmit the Memorandum to the Czech Government. Before parting, the Chancellor of the Reich and the British Prime Minister had a private conversation, during which Schmidt observed all the value Hitler attached to establishing good relations between Germany and England.

“There is no reason for friction between our two countries,” declared the Führer. “We will never hinder the pursuit of your extra-European interests. As for you, you can leave us a free hand on the continent without damage to yourselves, that is, in the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe.”

It was the first time that Hitler had so clearly suggested his desire to divide the world into zones of influence. To Germany, the spaces of the east. To England, mastery of the seas, the Commonwealth, and its African and Asian extensions. In view of these immense perspectives, why quarrel over a few acres of land on the edge of the Bohemian quadrilateral?

At two o’clock in the morning, the head of the Third Reich and the Prime Minister parted in an almost reassured atmosphere.

[[PDF page 442]]

XXII
EUROPE ON THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS
(24–28 September 1938)

On 23 September at 10:30 p.m., Czechoslovakia decreed general mobilization. In France, during the night of 23 to 24, all reservists whose booklets bore numbers 2 and 3—about six hundred thousand men

—were called to the colors. Belgium summoned certain categories of reservists. Poland and Hungary were on a war footing. On the 27th, England placed her fleet on alert. Mussolini mobilized his navy and concentrated several divisions facing the Alps, in Sicily, and in Libya.

Thus the last act of the drama was to unfold in the middle of an armed continent.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The War Minister recalled all men from twenty to forty years old. This represented a total of 1,500,000 men, including 300,000 Sudeten Germans, 90,000 Hungarians, and 10,000 Poles. Henlein immediately instructed the Sudeten Germans not to obey the mobilization order.

2. White posters were put up for this purpose in all town halls. Other posters gave the Government the right of requisition. They caused dismayed gatherings.

3. Placed on a war footing were: 22 cruisers and ships of the line, 114 torpedo boats, 91 submarines, 337 minelayers and light vessels, whose crews totaled 5,123 officers and 84,731 men. (Ciano, speech delivered before the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations, 30 November 1938.)

4. Mussolini first signed the order for general mobilization. Then he annulled it, fearing that it would harm his popularity. But he increased the number of soldiers under arms from 250,000 to 550,000, thanks to the following measures: 1) placing the frontier-protection troops of the west on a war footing; 2) mobilization of Anti-Aircraft Defense in Piedmont, Liguria, and along the Tyrrhenian coast; 3) reinforcement of the Alpine divisions at Cuneo, Turin, and Trent; 4) reinforcement of the army corps of Turin and Alessandria; 5) reinforcement of the garrisons of Pantelleria, Elba, and the Aegean islands; 6) reinforcement of the 20th and 21st Army Corps stationed in Libya; 7) reinforcement of the army corps of Sicily and Sardinia; 8) order to 10,000 men of the Army

[[PDF page 443]]

It was obviously in Bohemia that tension was greatest. Ah! Chancellor Renner had been quite right to say, when putting his signature at the foot of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, that the Allies were creating in the center of Europe a focus of discord from which a new world war might emerge!

When, on the afternoon of 21 September, the news that the Franco-British plan had been accepted by the Czech Government spread through the Sudeten territories, it unleashed an explosion of enthusiasm there. As at Linz, Graz, and Salzburg on the eve of the Anschluss, the population began to rise on its own. At Asch, Eger, and in the salients located in front of the fortified line where the percentage of Germans exceeded 90 percent, swastika banners appeared on town halls and churches, while the inhabitants began decorating the facades of their houses with garlands of flowers and flags. During the night of 21 to 22 September, representatives of the Sudeten Germans proposed to the local Czech authorities that they themselves take charge of security. Fearing that it would be overwhelmed, Prague accepted. The frontier military posts, the gendarmerie, and the Czech customs officials were withdrawn, with a few exceptions, and fell back behind the fortified line. On 22 September, from two o’clock in the morning, members of the Sudeten Party maintained order. They wore the uniform of the S.d.P., to which they had added swastika armbands. The frontiers were practically open, and thousands of Sudeten Germans who had gone to the Nuremberg Congress returned to their homes, where they were welcomed

of Spain to concentrate at Catalayud, to bring them back to Italy. (Ciano, id., Kurzbericht, 19 December 1938, p. 246.) This disposition is interesting because it differs completely from the measures taken in July 1934, at the time of Chancellor Dollfuss's assassination. (See vol. IV, p. 450.) This time the Italian forces were not turned toward the Brenner, but toward the Alps, the Mediterranean, and Africa.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
4. The German swastika emblem had until then been strictly forbidden within the frontiers of the Czech State.

5. Especially the young girls, for most of the young men—who did not want to be mobilized into the Czech Army—had gone to Saxony to enlist in Henlein's Free Corps.

[[PDF page 444]]

with demonstrations of joy. After having remained closed for several days, the shops were open again. Their windows were filled with portraits of Hitler and Henlein, framed with greenery and flowers. Processions marched through the streets singing patriotic hymns and Deutschland über alles. The directing committee of the S.d.P. issued a proclamation inviting the population to remain calm. But a few clashes took place between Free Corps volunteers and Czech gendarmes. During the night of 22 to 23 September, a Czech concrete casemate even opened fire on a group of German soldiers who had approached too close to the fortified zone.

What a contrast these scenes of rejoicing offered with those taking place at the same moment in Prague! The announcement of the acceptance of the Franco-British plan had raised a wave of anger and despair there. On the afternoon of 21 September, an increasingly turbulent crowd marched through the streets of the capital, uttering threats against the Government and hooting President Beneš. It demanded the establishment of a military dictatorship under General Syrový. Several thousand demonstrators headed for the Hradčany to call loudly for "the hero of the Siberian epic." General Syrový had to appear on a balcony to try to calm them. After him, M. Zenkl, the mayor of Prague, tried to do the same. But in vain. The demonstrators refused to disperse, and throughout the night a dark and feverish crowd continued to beat against the walls of the Hradčany like a raging sea.

On the morning of the 22nd, more than one hundred thousand people gathered before Parliament to demand the resignation of the Cabinet. The leader of the Czech Communist Party, M. Klement Gottwald, brought passions to their paroxysm by appealing to everyone's patriotism: "Our fatherland is in danger!" he cried. "You will save it only through a great surge of national union!" M. Ladislav Rašín,

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2. After Munich, Gottwald would take refuge in Moscow. He would direct the Communist coup d'état of 1948 that drove Beneš from power. (See above, p. 394, note 2.) He would then become President of the Czechoslovak Republic, a post he held until 1953, when he died after returning from Stalin's funeral.

3. The participation of numerous trade-union leaders and agitators of the Czech Communist Party in the demonstrations of 21–22 September is confirmed by

[[PDF page 445]]

the young leader of the nationalist party Narodné Sdružení, whose father had been assassinated by the Communists in 1923, answered him: “In this decisive hour, I no longer recognize parties. I am ready to collaborate with everyone, including the Communists, to ensure the defense of our fatherland! Those who are not ready to fight and die for it are not worthy of freedom!” His words were greeted by a storm of acclamations.

The pressure of the street and of the left-wing parliamentary groups was so strong that the Hodža government was forced to resign. On the evening of the 22nd, a new government composed of personalities chosen from outside Parliament was formed under the presidency of General Syrový. It presented itself as a government of national union. But this was only a facade. Behind it, M. Hodža re-formed a “shadow Cabinet,” on the pretext of “maintaining the link between the new Government and the parliamentary parties.” In reality, it was he who would continue to govern, sheltered behind General Syrový’s broad shoulders.

This double representation weakened the executive power more than it strengthened it. Yet the crowd declared itself satisfied. It approved the retention of M. Hodža and most of the outgoing ministers at the head of the “shadow Cabinet.” Forgetting that it had demanded their resignation a few hours earlier, it considered the affair settled and

many witnesses. (Cf. Hubert Ripka, Munich before and after, p. 108 ff.; G. E. R. Gedye, Fallen Bastions, p. 464 ff.; Pierre Buk [F. C. Weiskopf], La Tragédie tchécoslovaque, p. 65 ff.; Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, p. 542.)

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. It included: M. Krofta (Foreign Affairs); M. Kalfuss (Finance); Dr. Stanislav Bukovsky (chief of the Sokols); Dr. Zenkl (mayor of Prague); M. Vavrečka, and two Slovaks, Dr. I. Karvas and M. Černák, who would later be ministers of the Slovak Republic in Berlin.

2. According to Dr. Zenkl, two groups worked separately on the formation of this Cabinet of National Union. The first (L. Rašín, J. Stransky, H. Ripka, P. Zenkl, etc.) wanted to transform the Hodža ministry into a government of National Union. The second (General Krejčí, Hubert Masaryk, and the industrialist Preiss) preferred a sort of Committee of Public Safety composed only of military men. But Beneš opposed this by confining General Krejčí to his military duties and advising the presidents of the government parties not to give their adherence. (Declaration of Dr. Zenkl to Boris Celovsky.)

3. After having exercised power for twenty consecutive years, the government parties were not disposed to divest themselves of it overnight.

4. Monsignor Šrámek would later say that “by accepting this bastard solution, Beneš led his people to a new Battle of White Mountain.” (Beneš, Mnichovské dny, p. 36.)

[[PDF page 446]]

turned its anger against the “foreign traitors.” Several French and British nationals were manhandled. Members of the French military mission could no longer appear in uniform in the street. Its chief, General Faucher, sent his resignation to Paris in order to place himself at the disposal of the

Czechoslovak Army.

That same evening, as soon as the new Government was in place, Beneš spoke on the radio. His aim was manifestly to reassure minds:

“I observe without fear or weakness the evolution of the situation,” he declared. “I have already told you: I have never been afraid in all my life. Likewise, it is without fear that I view today the future of our State. I have a plan ready for every eventuality and shall let nothing divert me from it. We want understanding with all the great nations of the world. If this understanding is reached, provided of course that it is an honorable understanding, it will represent an advantage for our people as well. It will bring about a general understanding between England, France, and Germany, between Germany and us, between us and all the other States, including those of Eastern Europe... Our people are reasonable and realistic. They have always reacted as they should before perilous situations, and have always known how to distinguish the moments when it was necessary to fight from those when it was necessary to negotiate. If it is necessary to fight, we shall fight to the end; but if negotiation is unavoidable, then we shall negotiate. I repeat to you: I see things clearly and my plan is all ready.”

These sibylline words did not mean very much. They left all doors open and seemed dictated only by the desire to gain time. But that was only an appearance. In reality, they referred to a plan that Beneš had just elaborated in great secrecy during the preceding twenty-four hours, with the agreement, it seems, of General Syrový. It consisted in retroceding the Teschen district to

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1. “Bitterness toward France is so great,” cabled the press attaché of the German Legation, “that several French nationals have been harried in the street.” (Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, p. 542.)

3. Since the role he had played in the delivery of Admiral Kolchak to the Revolutionary Committee of Irkutsk (see above, p. 77), General Syrový had always been well regarded by the Communist leaders. One is entitled to wonder whether his elevation to the post of President of the Council, replacing M. Hodža, was not accepted by Beneš with the hidden thought of reassuring Moscow. His speech

Poland, on condition that the Warsaw Government authorize the passage of Soviet armies through its territory.

This plan terrified MM. Hodža, Beran, and the principal leaders of the Agrarian Party. They had observed the growing rise of the Communist Party, its feverish activity during these last days, and its efforts to monopolize the demonstrations of 22 September for its own profit. They had heard with concern Beneš’s allusion to understanding between Czechoslovakia and “the States of Eastern Europe.” In their dual capacity as Catholics and landowners, they had no wish to see Soviet vanguards emerge in Prague, for they thought that this would be the first step toward the communization of the country. Moreover, they said to themselves that if the Czech Government accepted the spontaneous cession of Teschen to the Poles, it would no longer have any argument to oppose the Sudeten Germans who demanded their incorporation into the Reich, nor the Hungarians of Slovakia who demanded their return to Hungary. In the long term, the plan built up by the President of the Republic would hasten the dismemberment that it was a matter of avoiding. In the immediate term, it widened the breach between

Beneš and Hodža, between Hodža and Syrový. At the moment when the territory was breaking apart, the Czechoslovak executive was disintegrating too.

Meanwhile, the Czech mobilization was in full swing. On 24 September, M. Krofta gathered a group of foreign diplomats to tell them:

“New concessions on our part are impossible, now that our mobilization is under way. We have passed the dangerous stage and we have the military situation well in hand. Yesterday we expected a first attack by the Luftwaffe, intended to prevent the concentration of our troops. It did not take place. This abstention must be interpreted as a sign of weakness. If our mobilization proceeds normally tomorrow and the day after, forty Czech divisions will be ready to face the eighty German divisions.”

could thus be interpreted as follows: “If it is necessary to fight, I shall fight with Syrový; if it is necessary to negotiate, I shall negotiate with Hodža.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. A glance at the map is enough to see that it is much easier for Russian troops to pass through Poland than through Romania.

[[PDF page 448]]

An hour later, all telephone and railway communications were broken between Czechoslovakia and Germany. Such was the atmosphere in which the Czech Government received the Godesberg Memorandum from M. Newton’s hands.

This time, the deliberations were brief. The Memorandum was unanimously rejected.

The next morning, 25 September, Jan Masaryk, Czechoslovak minister in London, handed the following note to Lord Halifax:

“The French and English Governments know very well that we accepted the so-called Franco-English plan only after extreme pressure and under the effect of constraint. We did not even have time to formulate observations on the impracticable character of some of its provisions. We nonetheless accepted it, convinced that it put an end to the demands being made of us, and because it emerged from the Franco-English pressures that these two Powers would guarantee our reduced frontiers and support us in the event that we were treacherously attacked...

“The new Czech Government, formed by General Syrový, still considers itself bound by the acceptance of the Franco-English plan given by the preceding Government.

“But we now receive a German Memorandum that is in reality an ultimatum, such as is usually addressed to a conquered people, and not a draft agreement presented to a sovereign State that has shown the greatest willingness to make sacrifices in favor of peace. M. Hitler’s Government has not shown the slightest willingness of this kind as far as it is concerned.

“My Government has learned with indignation the content of this Memorandum. Not only do the proposals it contains go much further than those of the Franco-English plan, but they remove all security from our national existence. They demand that we abandon a large part of our fortified system

and that we allow the German armies to thrust deep into our territory, without leaving us time to organize the country on new bases or to take any other measure to ensure its defense. Acceptance of this Memorandum would automatically amount to the loss of our national and economic independence. The whole procedure concerning the transfer of populations

[[PDF page 449]]

would be transformed into a desperate flight for all those who refuse to accept the National Socialist yoke. They would have to leave their homes without taking any of their personal belongings with them, not even their cows, in the case of agricultural populations.

“My Government wishes to declare solemnly that, in their present form, M. Hitler’s demands are totally and absolutely unacceptable. My Government feels bound to oppose them with the fiercest resistance, which we shall not fail to do with God’s help. The nation of Saint Wenceslas, John Huss, and Thomas Masaryk will never be a nation of slaves. In this hour of supreme distress, we count on the assistance of the two great Western Democracies, whose advice we followed, very much against our own judgment.”

Now people wondered how war could be avoided. Increasingly numerous German divisions were concentrating in Silesia, Bavaria, and Austria, while the Czech troops climbed toward their armored casemates.

Returning from Godesberg, Chamberlain had landed at Heston on 24 September, shortly after one o’clock. Before leaving Hitler, he had refused to take a position on his Memorandum and had confined himself to saying that he would transmit it to Prague. But he knew that the last chance of avoiding a conflict nonetheless lay in its acceptance by the Czech Government, even—so he hoped—in a softened form. This concern showed through in the words he addressed to the journalists when he got off the plane:

“I have good hope,” he told them, “that all those concerned will continue their efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Czechoslovak problem, for the peace of Europe in our time depends on it.”

Arriving at Downing Street, Sir Robert Vansittart warned him that British opinion was hardening and drew his attention to a message that had been sent to him by the World Jewish Congress:

“Our duty is to inform you of the growing anxiety

[[PDF page 450]]

felt by millions of Jews in face of Germany’s attempts to acquire new territories inhabited by Jews.

“The Jews of the whole world have not forgotten the inhuman treatment inflicted on the Jews of the Saar and Austria.

“The Executive of the World Jewish Congress therefore asks us to accept no settlement that would not absolutely safeguard the rights of the Jews.”

This did not make the negotiation easier... But it was growing late. After the exhausting days he had just lived through, Chamberlain needed a little rest. He therefore postponed all important decisions until the next day.

On Sunday, 25 September, in possession of the Czech Government's reply to the Godesberg Memorandum, he asked Daladier and Bonnet to come and confer with him. Then he summoned the restricted Cabinet and the Council of Ministers, to inform his colleagues of the results of his journey.

At first sight, the members of the British Government were dismayed by the reading of the German Memorandum. They were of the opinion that they too should reject it. Chamberlain answered them that "war had perhaps become inevitable, but that nothing had occurred to make it less perilous—from the English point of view." He informed his colleagues of the invitation he had extended to Daladier and Bonnet and asked them to make no irrevocable decision before he had seen them.

At three o'clock, the Council of Ministers met in Paris at the Élysée Palace. Daladier made his colleagues aware of the Godesberg Memorandum.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. About 360,000 Jews, or 2.7 percent of the population, lived in Czechoslovakia.

2. Shortly after these territories were attached to the Reich, the racial laws promulgated at Nuremberg on 15 September 1935 were applied there. (See vol. III, p. 310.)

3. Resolution voted on 18 September 1938 by the World Jewish Congress. An identical message was addressed to President Daladier. "In 1938," Chamberlain would tell Oswald Pirow, the South African Defense Minister whom he had charged with going to tell Hitler that an Anglo-German agreement was what he held most dear, "the Jews exerted strong pressure on me to dissuade me from concluding any arrangement with the Führer." (News Chronicle, 15 January 1952.)

"It is madness to believe that the Czechs will yield, now that they have mobilized," declared Daladier.

"What does Beneš say?" Mandel asked anxiously.

"And the English?" Sarraut interjected. "Do they too consider the Memorandum unacceptable?"

"It is still too early to say. We shall know shortly when we are in London," declared Bonnet. "As far as I am concerned, some points of the Memorandum seem unacceptable to me. But others could perhaps be the subject of discussion..."

"For my part," Daladier interrupted, "I shall never consent to the cession of the green zone."

"There are some of us who are not resigned to war!" exclaimed de Monzie, looking fixedly at Mandel.

His remark provoked a chorus of protests.

"Does anyone here want war?"

Finally, the ministers agreed on the following principles: 1) maintenance of the International Commission; 2) fixing of deadline dates for its constitution and the completion of its work; 3) possibility for the said Commission to consent to the symbolic and progressive occupation of certain portions of the territory; 4) refusal of any plebiscite in the green zone.

“What answer will you give the English,” de Monzie asked Daladier, “if they question you on France’s attitude in the event that Germany attacks Czechoslovakia?”

“I am willing to make every possible concession,” Daladier replied, “but in face of an unprovoked aggression, our commitments operate. I remain faithful to them. I have said so often enough for six months.”

The meeting was adjourned around four o’clock.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. The zone marked in green on the map attached to the Godesberg Memorandum is the one in which Hitler demanded the establishment of plebiscites. (See above, p. 433.)

2. On the Council of Ministers of 25 September, see Jean Zay, Carnets, p. 11 ff.; Anatole de Monzie, Ci-devant, p. 37 ff.

3. The following communiqué was published at the end of the Council: “The Government was unanimous in approving the declarations that the President of the Council and the Minister of Foreign Affairs propose to bring to London to the British Government.”

[[PDF page 452]]

Toward 5:30, the President of the Council and the Foreign Minister flew from Le Bourget. The weather was execrable. The wind blew violently and the rain fell in squalls. In the plane, the passengers were completely silent. Nothing could be heard except the rumble of the engines. The two ministers immersed themselves in their files without saying a word.

At Croydon, where they landed at nightfall, a few curious onlookers who were waiting for them despite the rain cried out when they saw them: “Vive la France!”

At nine o’clock, Daladier and Bonnet arrived at 10 Downing Street, where they were received by the Prime Minister. Beside him stood Lord Halifax, Sir John Simon, Sir Samuel Hoare, and, a little behind, Sir Horace Wilson, Sir Robert Vansittart, and Sir Alexander Cadogan.

As soon as the meeting opened, M. Chamberlain recounted the incidents of his meeting with Hitler. He concluded by saying:

“I made no commitment to the Chancellor except to transmit his Memorandum to the Czechoslovak Government for its opinion and to report on it to the French Government.”

Then he added, after a moment of silence:

“And you, what is your impression?”

“We consider the new claims set out by Hitler in his Memorandum absolutely exorbitant,” Daladier answered without the shadow of hesitation. “We cannot recommend to Czechoslovakia that it accept this project. Moreover, the Prague Government has already rejected it.”

“And if Germany invades Czechoslovakia as a result of this refusal?” Chamberlain asked.

“In that case,” Bonnet replied, “France will immediately give its assistance to Prague.”

“Could the International Commission, which was provided for during our conversations of 18 September, not be sent to the spot immediately?” Daladier asked.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Georges Bonnet, La Défense de la Paix, I, p. 267. This was the third time since the beginning of the year that the French ministers had gone to London. Their first visit took place on 28 and 29 April (see above, p. 310 ff.); the second on 18 September (see above, p. 395 ff.).

[[PDF page 453]]

“That solution has no chance of being accepted by Germany,” Chamberlain replied.

After this exchange of very brief observations, the diplomatic part of the conference was over. The French Government and the British Government agreed to reject the Godesberg Memorandum as a whole. “Then,” Bonnet tells us, “a new and long discussion began, concerning military questions alone.”

Chamberlain, Sir Samuel Hoare, and Sir John Simon, all speaking at the same time, suddenly took Daladier under a rolling fire of questions:

“What means does the French army have at its disposal to assist Czechoslovakia?”

“What is your battle plan against Germany?”

“Is your heavy artillery capable of destroying the German fortified lines?”

“Can France put on foot a sufficient number of infantry divisions, reconnoitered by powerful air forces and equipped with modern equipment, to conduct an offensive that will bring Germany down?”

Daladier, who was not only President of the Council but Minister of National Defense and War, defended himself step by step. He replied forcefully that France would keep her word and respect her commitments, but he clearly did not want to give his interlocutors details likely to discourage them. But the English were tenacious. They were satisfied neither with empty affirmations nor with approximate data. They wanted to know exactly where matters stood and resumed their interrogation where they had left it:

“Czechoslovakia, we are certain, will be crushed in a few days. France will then be alone against Germany. What means will she have available to defeat her?”

Daladier was in the hot seat. He began his explanations again, without managing, it seems, to convince his listeners. Then Chamberlain intervened:

[[PDF page 454]]

“I have gathered,” he declared, “the most alarming information on the state of the French air force and on the inability of your factories to replace the aircraft lost in the first days of the war. If a rain of bombs immediately falls on Paris, on the airfields, on the stations, on the railway centers, will France be able to defend herself and counterattack?”

But the President of the Council refused to engage further on technical ground. He went on the counterattack by asking Chamberlain:

“And you, Mr. Prime Minister, do you accept Hitler’s Memorandum?”

“It is not for me,” Chamberlain replied, “but for the Czechoslovak Government to accept or reject it...”

“But then,” Daladier insisted, “do you consider that France must remain passive?”

“It is not for the British Government to express an opinion on what France must do; it is for the French Government.”

The discussion continued like this for an hour, without any result. The Prime Minister began to show signs of fatigue. He asked whether it would not be possible to bring in General Gamelin. Since everyone considered this a good idea, they telephoned the general

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. They supposedly came from General Dentz, who had told Phipps of his apprehensions concerning the power of the Luftwaffe and the insufficiency of French aviation (Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 1034). Caillaux, for his part, had informed the British ambassador that very morning “that the majority of the Senate would vote against war.” (Id., II, 1083.) Phipps believed he could infer from this “that war would be very unpopular in France unless German aggression were brutal, bloody, and prolonged by the bravery of Czech resistance. I therefore consider,” he continued, “that His Majesty’s Government should become conscious of the extreme danger to which it would expose itself by giving even the appearance of supporting this noisy and corrupt little group that campaigns here in favor of war. Everything that is good in France is against war, almost at any price, whence the profound and pathetic gratitude felt toward our Prime Minister. Unless we are assured of considerable initial successes, everything best in France—and everything worst—will turn against us to accuse us of having pushed the French into fighting what ought to have appeared to us from the beginning as a battle lost in advance. To embark on what will probably be the greatest conflict in history with an ally who will fight—if she cannot do otherwise—without eyes (aviation) and without heart, must give us furious pause. I shall be asked why I did not express this opinion earlier. I shall answer that, until the last hour, the French anchored themselves in the idea that peace depended on Great Britain and not on Hitler. They convinced themselves that if England spoke firmly enough to Hitler, he would collapse.” (Id., II, 1076.)

[[PDF page 455]]

to ask him to be in London very early the next morning.

Toward three o'clock in the morning, Daladier and Bonnet finally left Downing Street. A crowd of onlookers, journalists, and photographers were waiting for them in front of the door. But they returned to the French embassy without making any statement.

Arriving at the embassy, Bonnet found several telegrams on his table. One had been sent by M. de Lacroix. The French minister in Prague reported in the following terms the conversation he had had with Beneš on the morning of 25 September:

"The President of the Republic summoned me this morning at eight o'clock. He had learned during the night of the German Memorandum and the attached map. He was at the height of emotion. From his indignation, expressed in broken phrases, I extract the following details: M. Beneš knows France's difficulties; he does not want to increase the difficulties either for France or for England; he maintains, together with his Government, the acceptance of the Franco-English proposal handed over last Monday, but he cannot go further. He will not go further. The plebiscite is unacceptable. It is a means of breaking up the State. It would give rise to the gravest disturbances; blood would be shed.

"M. Beneš concluded by asking the French Government to declare in London that France would not admit this plan."

That is precisely what Daladier and Bonnet had just done.

After this
first telegram, the Foreign Minister opened a second: it came from M. Albert Sarraut, Minister of the Interior. His services had just noticed that there were no gas masks to distribute to the Parisian population and asked that this deficiency be remedied by ordering one million masks in London. Immediately consulted, the British Defense Minister replied that he did not have enough himself for the population of London and that it was impossible for him to supply any. "These two telegrams," Georges Bonnet remarks, "seemed to illustrate the debate that had continued during the night between Daladier and the English ministers. It was evident that in this crisis our ends greatly exceeded our means."

[[PDF page 456]]

The next morning, MM. Daladier and Bonnet returned to Downing Street, accompanied by M. Corbin, ambassador of France, and General Gamelin, who had just arrived. A first conference took place among M. Daladier, General Gamelin, M. Neville Chamberlain, Sir Thomas Inskip, Minister for the Coordination of British Defense, and General Gort. Since it was devoted exclusively to military questions, neither Georges Bonnet nor Lord Halifax participated.

Chamberlain's attitude is easy to understand. For him, refusing to sponsor the Godesberg Memorandum was one thing; committing the whole British Empire to war was another. But he could remain outside the conflict only if France did not rush into it headlong. The English had at first believed, on the strength of reports from their ambassador in Paris, that the French Government, conscious of its unpreparedness, would be careful not to do so. The rolling fire of questions to which they had subjected

Daladier had no other purpose than to make him grasp the difference between wanting to make war and actually making it. But the very firm attitude of the President of the Council, and the no less firm words addressed to them by General Gamelin, changed their perspective. They told themselves that if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, France would march. This was no doubt madness, for the conflict would be engaged under the worst conditions. But such was the case. Hitler would then turn against France. French security would be compromised, and that England could not tolerate. She would therefore be obliged to intervene too. In that case, it was as well to make this known at once. Not because the Prime Minister judged that there was no other way out—he had not yet lost all hope of making a negotiated solution prevail—but because he told himself that a clear and plain affirmation of Franco-British solidarity was the only argument likely to make Hitler think. He therefore declared

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2. He invoked: 1) the strength of French infantry and of the Maginot Line; 2) German weaknesses: shortage of cadres, shortage of raw materials, incompletion of the Siegfried Line; 3) Italy's inability to wage a long war; 4) the possibility for Czechoslovakia to prolong its resistance by holding firm north and south of Moravia, even if it had to abandon part of the territory. (General Gamelin, Servir, II, pp. 351–352. Conversation with M. Neville Chamberlain, 26 September 1938.)

to the French ministers, after conferring for a moment with his colleagues:

"I understand your position perfectly. I am going to send Sir Horace Wilson to Berlin, bearing a personal message for Hitler in which I shall inform the Chancellor of the Reich that the Czechoslovak Government has rejected his Memorandum. At the same time I shall press him to resort to negotiation rather than force. If he refuses despite all my warnings, Sir Horace Wilson will read him the following declaration: 'The French Government has informed us that it would fully carry out its obligations in the event of a German attack on Czechoslovakia. If France found herself drawn into hostilities against Germany in execution of treaty obligations, the United Kingdom would feel bound to come to her aid.'"

The French delegation took note of this with satisfaction. A communiqué announced to the public that agreement had been reached between the two governments and that Sir Horace Wilson was going to leave immediately for Germany. After lunching in London, Daladier and Bonnet took the plane again for Paris, where they landed at 4:30 p.m. under a driving rain.

Arriving at the Quai d'Orsay, the Foreign Minister found a crowd of journalists and onlookers waiting for him in the antechamber. To their anguished questions, he answered in a tired tone:

"I fear now that war is inevitable..."

A few moments later, Sir Eric Phipps was announced. He insisted that France undertake no offensive military action without prior consultation with the British Government. Bonnet promised him this, but he took the opportunity to address the fundamental question:

"The British Government," he told the ambassador, "has informed us that in case of war it could place at our disposal during the first six

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. “It can be seen that the Prime Minister’s letter defined France’s position without ambiguity,” writes Georges Bonnet. “As for England, the formula used by M. Chamberlain, although it did not mean that England was resolved to enter immediately into war against Germany at France’s side, was nevertheless firmer than the one used until then by the British Government.” (La Défense de la Paix, I, p. 271.)

[[PDF page 458]]

months only one hundred and fifty aircraft and two non-motorized divisions. You know today the extreme gravity of the situation. France is now on the brink of war. You will certainly find it legitimate that the French Government ask you for clarifications on a certain number of points:

“1. If war breaks out because France has assisted Czechoslovakia, is the British Government ready to decree general mobilization immediately?

“2. Is it decided to have conscription voted?

“3. Does it accept that England pool with us all her economic and financial resources for the conduct of the war?”

“I cannot give you any assurance on all these points,” Phipps replied, after reflecting for a long moment. “If we promise you only such weak aid on land and in the air, it is because we cannot do more.”

“I have a plan ready for every eventuality,” Beneš had said on Prague radio on the evening of 21 September, “and I shall let nothing divert me from it.” It consisted, in the face of the hesitations of London and Paris, in neutralizing Poland and Hungary, with the hidden thought of facilitating Soviet intervention.

On 26 September, M. Ignacy Mościcki, President of the Polish Republic, received a personal letter from Beneš, dated the 22nd, in which he proposed “the re-establishment of friendly relations between their two countries through a settlement of the frontier disputes that set them against each other.” In other words, the Czechoslovak Government would be disposed to return

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4. The fact that this letter is dated the 22nd demonstrates that the plan evoked by Beneš in his radio speech indeed concerned Poland. The delay in its transmission was due to the fact that the Prague Government first wanted to sound out the son of the President of the Polish Republic, who held the functions of chargé d’affaires in Brussels, on his father’s possible reactions. M. Mościcki junior’s reply was not very encouraging. (Cf. Szemdrk, Journal, 1933–1939, 25 September 1938.)

[[PDF page 459]]

the territory of Teschen to Poland in exchange for a “more active” position in favor of Prague. But Beneš was in the situation of Emperor Charles on the eve of the dislocation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire: nothing could now succeed for him. Just like the partial mobilization of 20 May and the

proposal to cede the “German salients” to the Reich, this ultimate attempt to escape encirclement would turn against him. It came much too late for the Poles to consent to it.

Why would they pay such a high price—the passage of Russian troops through their territory—for the transfer of a province they were sure of obtaining for nothing? Thus, M. Mościcki replied to Beneš in a polite but cold fashion. He admitted “that an amicable settlement of the Teschen question would appreciably improve Polish-Czech relations,” but refused to enter into discussion of the substance. As for M. Lipski, the Polish ambassador in Berlin, he had the very next day a conference with Ribbentrop and Weizsäcker, during which he confirmed to his interlocutors that Poland remained faithful to the policy defined in its note of 21 September and announced to them that Polish troops were concentrating on the Czech frontier.

At that moment, the U.S.S.R. made an unexpected gesture. On 23 September, M. Potemkin, Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, handed the Polish chargé d’affaires in Moscow a note in which he said:

“The concentrations of Polish troops on the Czech frontier seem to indicate that the Polish Government is preparing to seize a part of Czechoslovak territory. Until now the Polish Government has not denied this intention. That is why the Soviet Government believes itself bound to draw its attention to the fact that it would be obliged to denounce without notice the non-aggression pact concluded on 25 July 1932 between the U.S.S.R. and Poland, in the event that the latter attacked Czechoslovakia.”

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3. The note of 21 September 1938, fixing Poland’s attitude, was addressed simultaneously to Prague, London, and Paris. It was drafted following the meeting M. Lipski had on the 20th with Hitler at Berchtesgaden. (See above, p. 410 ff.)

4. This declaration was in line with M. Litvinov’s remarks to M. Coulondre in London. (See above, p. 345.) Cf. Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, report of M. von der Schulenburg, II, p. 582.

[[PDF page 460]]

Colonel Beck shrugged his shoulders while reading this message, which did not even bear the ministry’s heading: in his eyes it was only a gesture—a propaganda gesture.

“The measures that Poland may be led to take to ensure her defense,” he replied, “depend solely on the Polish Government. On this subject it owes no explanation to anyone. The Polish Government knows perfectly well the text of the treaties it has signed.” A deliberately insolent reply, designed to keep the U.S.S.R. at a distance...

But the increased demands formulated by Hitler in his Godesberg Memorandum and their formal rejection by the Czechoslovak Government had restored confidence to the English elements hostile to conciliation. On 26 September, Attlee sent Chamberlain a letter inviting him to take account of the motion voted on 8 September by the Labour Party, asking the British Government “to constitute a single Anglo-Franco-Russian front in the event that Germany attacked Czechoslovakia.” That same day, during the afternoon, Churchill went to Downing Street to plead once again the cause of the “Grand Alliance.” The Prime Minister received him in the presence of Vansittart and Halifax. Chamberlain—as we have seen—was in no way convinced of the effectiveness of this formula. But he

no doubt judged that in the situation of the moment, it was appropriate to exert the greatest possible pressure on Hitler. He therefore let Vansittart publish that evening a communiqué affirming that "if the Czechs were attacked, France would march," and that "England and Russia would be at her side."

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Confidential statement by Colonel Beck to M. von Moltke, Reich ambassador in Warsaw. Beck was wrong. The meaning of this démarche would reveal itself later.

2. The U.S.S.R. was not asking for anything better. When, on 30 September, Warsaw addressed a formal ultimatum to Prague, Moscow did not react. It was in any case too late. (Boris Celovsky, Das Münchener Abkommen, p. 442.)

5. A whole polemic developed around this communiqué, concerning which the U.S.S.R. had not been consulted. It sowed all the greater confusion among the partisans of peace because it contradicted remarks made elsewhere by Chamberlain. Transmitted by M. Comert, head of the press services of the Quai d'Orsay, to the Paris newspapers, they alerted Bonnet and asked him what credence should be given to this text. The Foreign Office, when questioned, answered awkwardly that it was "not an official communiqué, but information drawn from an authorized source." Finally, it would be claimed that it was, if not a falsehood, at least a personal initiative of Vansittart. According to Churchill's account (The Second World War, I, 1, p. 376 ff.), which asserts that the communiqué was drafted "in his presence by a high official of the Foreign Office," it seems difficult to believe that neither Halifax nor Chamberlain had been informed of it. Today this discussion has lost much of its interest.

[[PDF page 461]]

Does this mean that Russia was ready to intervene? Here, once again, one can advance only with caution because of the non-publication of the Kremlin archives. But certain irrefutable facts and Litvinov's declarations nonetheless make it possible to form an opinion.

After a first phase during which the U.S.S.R. defended the free right of peoples to dispose of themselves, then a second in which it made itself the champion of the status quo, its foreign policy now entered a third phase: that of tactical withdrawal. It is therefore important to distinguish carefully between its real diplomatic commitments and the demonstrations in which it engaged for simple propaganda purposes.

For a long time Litvinov had hoped to make a general war come out of the Czech cauldron, one that would ruin the West and allow the communist revolution to make a new leap forward. But after mature reflection, he had reached the conclusion that despite all his efforts, the conflict would not take place and that the capitalist democracies would end by reaching an understanding with the Reich, at Czechoslovakia's expense and to Moscow's detriment. Chamberlain's trip to Berchtesgaden had anchored him in this conviction.

"Believe me," he declared on 16 September at Geneva, "there will be no war. They will sell Czechoslovakia. I know the Chamberlains!"

From that moment, the U.S.S.R. began to retreat. The problem for it consisted in doing so without losing face, that is, without letting foreign Communist Parties suspect

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2. Litvinov's three speeches from the rostrum of the League of Nations on 21, 23, and 24 September, and Marshal Voroshilov's reply to General Gamelin on the morning of 26 September, belong to this second category. As for Stalin, he did not risk being caught contradicting himself, for the good reason that he confined himself to impenetrable silence.

[[PDF page 462]]

that it was abandoning without hope those whom it had until then defended so bitterly.

When, on 19 September, Beneš had put the following two questions to M. Trojanowski: "1. If France fulfills her obligations, will the U.S.S.R. do the same? 2. If France refuses to fulfill her obligations and Czechoslovakia decides to resist Germany, what would the Soviet Union do?" the U.S.S.R. minister in Prague asked to consult Moscow. He did not return to the Hradčany until the evening of the 21st, to tell Beneš:

"To the first question, the answer is yes. To the second, my Government's position is more nuanced. It considers that in the event that France does not fulfill her obligations and Germany attacks Czechoslovakia, the latter should immediately lodge a complaint before the Council of the League of Nations. In the event that the Council does not reach a unanimous vote, the U.S.S.R. would be satisfied with a vote obtained by majority."

When Beneš protested that this was a much too slow procedure and that Czechoslovakia would be engulfed before the League of Nations had had time to pronounce, M. Trojanowski consulted his Government a second time. After which he declared:

"Let Czechoslovakia denounce the aggressor before the League of Nations. The Soviet Union will consider this démarche sufficient to permit it to intervene."

Had Beneš hoped that Moscow would bring him unconditional assistance? In that case, he realized how far he was from the mark. Since he sensed that his dealings with the Soviets supplied additional arguments to German propaganda, that they frightened a whole sector of his public opinion, and that the leaders of his General Staff had clearly let him know that, for Czechoslovakia, "to want to resist Germany alone would be equivalent

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. That would reveal the degree to which its foreign policy was dominated by Moscow's exclusive interests.

3. Goebbels began presenting the conflict with Prague as the beginning of an anti-Bolshevik Crusade.

4. Certain left-wing writers, notably Pierre Buk (F. C. Weiskopf), assert that Cabinet members belonging to the Agrarian Party (Hodža?) went so far as to threaten Beneš "to open the frontiers to the Germans if he persisted in calling on Soviet aid." (La Tragédie tchécoslovaque, p. 25 ff.)

[[PDF page 463]]

to suicide, even taking account of the help Russia might bring," Beneš opted for acceptance of the Franco-British plan. That same day, Litvinov declared at Geneva that "the acceptance of the Franco-British plan was equivalent to denunciation of the Czecho-Soviet pact."

Thus, the U.S.S.R., which had always subordinated its intervention to France's entry into the war and to the prior authorization of Poland and Romania to let its troops pass through their territory, was now demanding a vote of the League of Nations! And at what moment did it do so? On the afternoon of 21 September, when it knew that Prague had already virtually accepted the Franco-British plan, which excluded all recourse to the Geneva body.

Yet a very simple path still lay open to it: to bring the affair itself before the League of Nations. Article 11 of the Geneva Covenant gave it full latitude to do so. But Litvinov would be very careful not to do this.

During the following days, the Soviet newspapers adopted an increasingly reserved attitude concerning possible support for Czechoslovakia. Soon that topic disappeared completely from their columns.

On 23 September, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs delivered a major speech before the 6th Commission of the League of Nations. A fact all the more worthy

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Following this démarche, the Government unanimously decided that Czechoslovakia could not face Germany alone, even if the U.S.S.R. came to its aid. (Mackenzie Compton, Doctor Beneš, London, 1946, p. 214.)

2. Later, in writing his Memoirs, M. Beneš presented matters in a somewhat different light. To believe him, the Czech Government did not want to ask for Soviet aid "in order to remove any pretext from Hitler to unleash an anti-communist Crusade which, occurring at a moment when Russia was not ready to face it, could have dealt a mortal blow to the Moscow regime." But one must take account of the fact that Beneš wrote his Memoirs in 1942, at a time when he was striving by every means to obtain from Stalin recognition of his government in exile.

3. Hitler, for his part, was informed of this on 21 September at 11:45 in the morning. (Documents of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, XXVIII, PS-1780, p. 387.)

4. "It is further declared that any member of the League of Nations has the right, in a friendly capacity, to draw the attention of the Assembly or the Council to any circumstance likely to affect international relations and consequently threaten to disturb the peace or good understanding between nations on which peace depends."

5. Just as he would never himself ask Romania for authorization to cross its territory. He would merely invite France to do so in his place. (Declaration of M. Comnène.)

6. "In the press, not a single word is to be found concerning Russian support for Czechoslovakia." (Report of M. von der Schulenburg, Reich ambassador in Moscow, Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, II, p. 620.)

of note was that the Czechoslovak question was not on its agenda.

“The Soviet Union,” he declared, “has undertaken to lend assistance to the Prague Government only on condition that France intervenes. It would have no obligation toward Czechoslovakia if France looked on as an indifferent spectator at an aggression perpetrated against her. In that case, the U.S.S.R. could come to her aid only by virtue of a decision it would take itself, or of a resolution voted by the League of Nations. But let no one be mistaken: this aid would in no way correspond to a duty. The Czech Government has never raised the question of our assistance in case of French non-intervention, and the acceptance of the Franco-British plan morally gives the Soviet Government the right to consider the Russo-Czech Pact null and void. Nevertheless, I am willing to admit that it is still in force...”

A few hours later, at the request of the Foreign Office, the English delegates came to ask Litvinov to clarify the meaning of his words.

“War may break out tomorrow,” they told him. “In case of conflict, what material aid would the U.S.S.R. bring to Czechoslovakia?”

“It is impossible for me to specify the extent of our mobilization,” Litvinov replied, “or the degree to which our air force could come to its aid.”

The British delegates, who reported these words to London, ended their account with these disillusioned words:

“M. Litvinov is very pessimistic concerning the future.”

That the Russian delegate was reluctant to retreat is obvious. But that he concealed his withdrawal behind a smoke screen changes nothing in the matter.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. This is inaccurate. M. Beneš put precisely this question to M. Trojanowski on 19 September, and the latter answered it only after consulting his Government. (See above, p. 458.)

2. Boris Celovsky, op. cit., p. 442. See also Izvestia of 26 September 1938 and the Frankfurter Zeitung of the 27th. In short, Moscow used toward London the same language that London used toward Paris. (See Phipps’s reply to Bonnet, p. 454.)

3. “In Chamberlain’s mind,” writes Keith Feiling, “nothing constructive emerged from the talks with Litvinov at Geneva.” (Op. cit., p. 371.)

4. It was the bankruptcy of Litvinov’s entire policy. But Stalin did not want to run the risk of finding himself alone facing Germany once Czechoslovakia had been crushed. Even the tension caused by the Godesberg Memorandum would not alter his line of conduct.

[[PDF page 465]]

Meanwhile, Sir Horace Wilson was flying toward Berlin, bearing a personal message from Chamberlain to Hitler. He was received around five o’clock at the Chancellery, in Ribbentrop’s

presence. Sir Nevile Henderson and Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick accompanied him.

Schmidt, the Führer's interpreter, began to translate the British Prime Minister's letter: "The Czechoslovak Government has just informed me that it rejects as totally unacceptable the proposals contained in your Memorandum... I had already predicted this to you before leaving Godesberg... The best thing, in these conditions, would be for the modalities of the cession to be worked out by direct contacts between Berlin and Prague..."

From the first sentence, Hitler's face darkened. But when he heard talk of direct contacts between Beneš and himself, he could no longer contain himself.

"The continuation of negotiations no longer has any meaning!" he roared, moving toward the door of his office without even taking leave of the English diplomats. But suddenly, realizing how outrageous this hasty exit would be, he retraced his steps and mastered himself sufficiently for Schmidt to continue reading the letter.

But even before the translation was finished, Hitler literally exploded. "There followed," the Führer's interpreter tells us, "one of the most tumultuous scenes I have ever experienced, not that Hitler's anger bore any resemblance to the hysterical fits of rage that foreign countries later often attributed to him and of which, for my part, I was never a witness, but the conversation turned into a veritable hubbub." Everyone spoke at the same time;

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Wilson left London in the morning of 26 September, immediately after the French ministers' departure. He landed at Tempelhof around 3:30 p.m.

2. This is the message of which the Prime Minister had spoken to Daladier and Bonnet at the end of the Franco-British conference of 25 and 26 September. (See above, p. 453.)

3. Paul Schmidt, Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne, p. 408 ff. Hitler was all the angrier because he had learned since the previous day that England and France had given their assent to Czech mobilization. He saw in this a proof of duplicity, which removed all his confidence in Sir Horace Wilson's declarations.

[[PDF page 466]]

no one could hear anyone else. The Führer hurled imprecations against Beneš and the Czechs. Wilson was completely disarmed before this hurricane. His thin voice could not dominate that of his interlocutor, so that he had difficulty getting in a word. He nevertheless tried to calm Hitler, but each of his words only increased his anger.

"On 1 October," Hitler asserted in a thunderous voice, "I shall have brought the Czechs where I want them!"

Finally, Wilson succeeded in asking him to receive the Czech negotiators all the same.

"Well then, so be it!" Hitler replied. "I shall receive them. But on two conditions: that the Czech Government accept my Memorandum, and that it deliver the territories to me on 1 October. I await its

reply before 28 September at two o'clock."

The meeting ended on this threatening phrase.

An hour and a half later, Hitler delivered a major speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin. The hall, built to hold twenty-five thousand spectators, was packed to the rafters.

"The question that has concerned us most for several weeks," he cried, "is known to everyone. It is called not so much Czechoslovakia as M. Beneš! This name alone sums up everything that fills millions of men with despair, anger, or fanatical resolve!"

Such was the exordium. With great skill, Hitler did not attack the Czech people. He concentrated his attacks on Beneš himself, with such violence that François-Poncet would say: "Such an attack, so personal and so angry, is unique in the annals of contemporary history."

Hitler reviewed his efforts to reach an understanding with his neighbors and cited as an example his reconciliation with Poland:

"Now," he continued, "there stands before us the last problem that we have to solve. This is the last territorial claim that I have to formulate in Europe, but it is a demand that I cannot renounce and that I shall realize, God helping... The Czech State was founded on a lie, and the father of that lie is called Beneš!"

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. At the moment when Hitler was about to mount the platform, he was handed the following telegram from Lord Rothermere: "I have many times given you proofs of my friendship for Germany and am convinced that you will not resent it if I appeal to you before your speech this evening. Peace and war are in the balance, and I know as you do the horrors of war, for you are aware that I lost two of my three sons in the last world conflict. A word of hope from you would bring immense relief to millions of men." (Lord Rothermere, Warnungen und Prophezeiungen, Zurich, 1939, p. 171 ff.)

[[PDF page 467]]

Hitler then gave the history of Czechoslovakia. He denounced the way in which the Czech Government had violated the Treaty of Saint-Germain concerning minorities, the mistreatment it had never ceased inflicting on the German population, and the partial mobilization it had carried out on 21 May:

"In the long run, France and England were moved by it. They proposed to Czechoslovakia the only possible solution: the liberation of the German territory and its restoration to the Reich. Beneš himself recognized that these territories had to be ceded. But what does he do? Instead of ceding the territories, he expels their inhabitants. This is where the game ends. Whole regions are depopulated, villages burned, Germans driven out with tear-gas grenades. Meanwhile, M. Beneš is in Prague, persuaded that nothing can happen to him because he has behind him France and England!"

Hitler then evoked his Memorandum:

"For twenty years this has lasted, twenty years during which the German people of the Reich had to look on as spectators at the martyrdom of their Sudeten brothers, not that they ever accepted this

situation, but because they were without weapons to protect them against their executioners! Now this game must stop! I therefore demanded that Beneš be brought to the wall and driven into the truth. I demanded that the German territories be handed over to us before 1 October.

“To this I can add only this: two men now stand face to face, M. Beneš and I. Two men, to tell the truth, very dissimilar. When the peoples were locked in a bloody embrace, M. Beneš sought refuge in the antechambers of ministries, while I fulfilled my soldier’s duty in the mud of the trenches. Today I stand before him as the soldier of my people.”

[[PDF page 468]]

After a few warm words addressed to Chamberlain, whose efforts to prevent a conflict he praised, Hitler added:

“I assured the Prime Minister that from the moment the Czech problem is settled, that is, when the Czechs have also reached agreement with their other minorities, and that peacefully, without resorting to violence, the Czech State will no longer interest me. I am ready to guarantee this to him. We have no use for the Czechs! But I also declare to the German people that, as far as the Sudeten Germans are concerned, my patience is at an end. The decision is now in Beneš’s hands. Peace or war! Either he will accept my proposals and finally grant freedom to the Germans, or we shall go and liberate them ourselves. Let the world take note! In four and a half years of war and during the long years of my political struggle, no one has ever been able to accuse me of having been a coward. Now I march at the head of my people as its first soldier, and the world must know that the people who follow me no longer have any connection with that of 1918. If a clique of rotten intellectuals was able at that time to inject into it the poison of democratic phraseology, the German people of today are totally immunized against it. These phrases have no more effect on it than wasp stings. In this hour, the whole German people will be one with me. It will realize that my will is its own, that my acts are only the guarantees of its future and its destiny. That is why I adjure you, O my German people: gather behind me, men beside men, women beside women, so as to form with my own will only one common will. Let that will be stronger than misery and danger, for if it is stronger, misery and danger will be broken. We are resolved! Let M. Beneš choose!”

On returning to the Chancellery, Hitler gave Goebbels the order to center all his propaganda on the person of Beneš. Then he instructed General Keitel to mobilize secretly five additional divisions and ordered the assault formations to leave their exercise grounds to occupy their starting positions.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. From the next morning, all the Reich newspapers fired red-hot shot at Beneš, and mass meetings were organized in the principal cities of Germany. There the President of the Czechoslovak Republic was vilified and motions of loyalty were addressed to the Führer. On 28 September, the tone of German propaganda rose still further and reached unheard-of violence.

2. The directives addressed by Hitler to the O.K.W. provided for the opening

[[PDF page 469]]

A few moments later, the Führer was brought the Foreign Office communiqué, broadcast around eight

o’clock, assuring that “if, despite all the efforts made by the Prime Minister, Germany engaged in aggression against Czechoslovakia, France would be bound to lend her assistance and that, in that case, Great Britain and Russia would be at her side.”

At once the diplomatic corps, judging that war was inevitable, made arrangements to ensure the repatriation of its nationals. In Prague, trenches were dug, public buildings were protected, sandbags were piled before the legations in anticipation of air attacks that might begin at any moment.

However, a little after midnight—that is, four hours after the publication of the Foreign Office communiqué—Chamberlain spoke on English radio. The tone of his address offered a surprising contrast with that of the communiqué. The Prime Minister thanked the Chancellor for the kind words he had had for him in his Sportpalast speech. He paid tribute “to the efforts he too had made to safeguard peace,” and concluded by expressing the hope that he would accept the Franco-British suggestions, “thanks to which the Sudeten populations could be incorporated into the Reich without spilling a single drop of blood.” After that, he charged Sir Horace Wilson, who was still in Berlin, with having a new interview with him in order to tell him on his behalf “that England is prepared to guarantee the execution of the promises already made by Prague, on condition that Germany abstains from resorting to force.”

of operations for 30 September, D-Day, which was to be fixed the previous day at noon. However, they specified that mobilization measures were to be executed in such a way “that they do not provoke an aggravation of the political situation.” (Trial W. Prosecution documents, v. 3 A, NG-3067; Documents of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, XXV, PS-388, S-484.) At the same time, Hitler instructed the Sudeten Free Corps to intensify its activity and ordered it to occupy certain small salients of western Bohemia.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. This is the communiqué drafted by Vansittart in Churchill’s presence. (See above, p. 456.)

3. “You will make this démarche,” Chamberlain specified to Wilson, “in a tone more sad than angry—more in sorrow than anger. You will also say that, following the personal attacks formulated by the Chancellor against Beneš in his speech, it seems to me excluded that the Czechs should send a delegation to Berlin.”

[[PDF page 470]]

On 27 September, a little before noon, Sir Horace Wilson returned to the Chancellery to hand Hitler Chamberlain’s new message. He began by congratulating the Führer on the spectacular success brought to him by his Sportpalast speech, assured him that the Prime Minister had been very touched by the friendly words he had had for him, and declared that Chamberlain considered himself personally responsible for the execution of the Czech promises.

But Hitler paid no attention to his words. The storm that had rumbled within him since the previous day had not yet subsided.

“What am I to say to the Prime Minister when I return to London?” Wilson asked the Chancellor. “Is there no message that I can transmit to him?”

“None,” Hitler replied. “You will confine yourself to thanking him for his efforts. From now on there is only one alternative: either Prague accepts my Memorandum, and then all is well; or it rejects it... I await the reply tomorrow before two o’clock... If it is negative, I shall enter the Sudeten territories on 1 October at the head of the German Army.”

“The result will be a conflict whose outcome no one can foresee,” Wilson objected. “France is ready to fulfill her obligations toward Prague, and England will be bound to fulfill hers toward Paris...”

These words from the English diplomat caused the storm to rise again.

“But I have no intention of attacking France!” Hitler cried, raising his voice. “It is not for nothing that I have spent four and a half billion on the construction of the western fortifications! It is offensive, in the end, to see England prefer Czechoslovakia to a Great Power like Germany! Yet she could have had no better friend than me. I have repeated it often enough in my declarations and speeches.”

“All is not lost...” Wilson insisted. “There is perhaps still a way to make the Czechs more pliable...”

But Hitler would hear nothing. That morning it was impossible to have a reasonable conversation with him. Only imprecations and threats came from his mouth. His tone rose and soon reached terrifying violence. Then, no longer knowing what to do, Wilson rose from his armchair and said, emphasizing every word:

[[PDF page 471]]

“Since that is so, I have only to carry out the last mission with which the Prime Minister charged me. It consists in officially warning you that in the event that France were drawn into hostilities against Germany in execution of treaty obligations, the United Kingdom would feel bound to come to her aid.”

Schmidt translated this phrase with deliberate slowness, to allow the Chancellor to measure its full scope.

“I take note of this declaration,” Hitler replied in a thunderous voice. “It means that if France sees fit to attack Germany, England will feel bound to attack her too. Well then, so be it! If France and England want to strike, let them do so! It is completely indifferent to me. I am ready to face all eventualities. Next week, we shall all be at war with one another.”

That was his last word. Wilson took leave and headed for the door. He seemed to hesitate for a few moments before crossing its threshold, as though hoping that Hitler would call him back, would say something to him...

But the Führer remained silent. There would be no other reply to Chamberlain’s message. The door closed again. The dice were cast.

An hour later, Sir Nevile Henderson addressed the following telegram to the Prime Minister:

“Now the situation is clear. If tomorrow, 28 September, at two o’clock, the Czechs have not accepted the German Memorandum and if they have not withdrawn their troops from the Sudeten territories, Hitler will proclaim general mobilization and France will do the same. If the British nation wishes to

engage in a war, nothing remains for it but to prepare for it actively."

On receipt of this message, Chamberlain mobilized the fleet.

That same evening, from six to seven o'clock, a military parade took place through the streets of Berlin. Hitler had ordered it for propaganda purposes: he wanted to show the force he would soon use and stimulate the warlike ardor of his compatriots. The armored division of Pomerania passed with a roar along Wilhelmstrasse, where the British Embassy and the Reich Chancellery were located. The street was black with people, for it was the hour when offices closed. But the crowd massed on the sidewalks displayed no enthusiasm. It watched the tanks pass in mute stupor, so much did it fear that this demonstration foreshadowed tomorrow's reality. No salute was thrown to the soldiers; no

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. This was the formula on which Chamberlain and Daladier had agreed at the end of the London conference. (See above, p. 453.)

[[PDF page 472]]

answer came from the column. Captain Wiedemann, the Führer's aide-de-camp, who crossed the parade while leaving the Hotel Adlon, felt his heart tighten. Despite himself, he compared this silence with the ovations that had surrounded the departure of his regiment in 1914...

When he entered the great hall of the Chancellery, already invaded by the shadows of twilight, he could not keep himself from exclaiming:

"My children! It is a real funeral march going on outside!"

"Hush!" his colleague Schaub told him, signaling to him to be quiet. "He is at the window!"

On the balcony, indeed, Hitler was watching the parade. Bareheaded, both fists thrust into the pockets of his tunic, he leaned over the balustrade. A group of generals surrounded him at a respectful distance. One could see Admiral Raeder's gold embroidery glitter in the half-light. Below, the spectators' faces remained frozen. Only anxious brows and closed mouths could be seen. Why were they not launching their usual "Sieg Heil"? The armored column continued on its way in a thunderous rumble. But the crowd was silent, as if to give its chief a silent warning...

Vexed, Hitler returned into the Chancellery and shut himself in his office. It was the first time in five years that he had not been acclaimed.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. This would have been the moment, if ever there was one, for the generals of the opposition to launch their coup de force. Hitler was in Berlin. The Allies had notified him that there would be war if he persisted in wanting to invade Czechoslovakia. The crowd seemed frightened by the imminence of a conflict. Yet they did nothing. Not the slightest inclination toward a putsch was reported.

3. The next day, at lunch, Goebbels, who had preserved his frankness, would tell Hitler openly what the others did not dare admit to him: "My

[[PDF page 473]]

At the hour when this parade was taking place, Chamberlain received Sir Horace Wilson, who had just returned from Berlin. Wilson described in detail his two meetings with Hitler and ended by quoting the Chancellor's last sentence: "Next week, we shall all be at war with one another."

Chamberlain compared these declarations with Sir Nevile Henderson's last dispatch. They coincided exactly. All this alarming news, added one item after another, struck him in the deepest part of himself. Jan Masaryk, who saw him that day, found him crushed and terribly aged. His cheeks had hollowed, his mouth was bitter, and his eye sockets were no more than two holes of shadow. For nearly a year now he had been striving to ward off disaster. Was he going to fail? Despite his fatigue and his age, he refused to admit defeat. He would pursue his efforts until the last minute.

His first action was to charge Newton with a personal message for Beneš:

"I wish to tell you," he wrote to him, "that according to the information now in the possession of His Majesty's Government, the German forces have received the order to cross the Czechoslovak frontier if tomorrow, at two o'clock, the Czechoslovak Government has not accepted the German proposals. This will have the result that Bohemia will be submerged. No other Power, whatever it may do, will be able to spare your country and your people this fate, whatever the outcome of a possible war may be. His Majesty's Government does not wish to take the responsibility of telling you what you must do. But it considers that this information must reach you immediately."

Fearing that this message was not sufficiently explicit, Chamberlain sent a second one, which M. Newton

Führer, if you believe that the German people are marching joyfully to war, you are mistaken. I was in the middle of the crowd last night. Far from being enthusiastic, people were rather gloomy and frightened. They do not want war." (Cf. Wiedemann, op. cit., p. 176.)

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 1136. "A terrible warning, whose official and severe style chills me," writes Georges Bonnet (La Défense de la Paix, I, p. 279).

[[PDF page 474]]

handed to M. Krofta an hour and a half later. In it, the Prime Minister announced that, while not approving the Godesberg Memorandum, he was working on the preparation of a new plan fixing a precise schedule for the evacuation of the Sudeten territories. "This plan," he stated, "represents the very last hope of saving your country." If the Czechoslovak Government refused to accept it, then there would be only one alternative left: total invasion or dismemberment by force. Although a generalized conflict might follow, with its loss of human life and incalculable destruction, it was impossible to imagine that after this conflict, and whatever its outcome, Czechoslovakia could be restored within its present frontiers. In other words, even in the event of a victorious war, the Sudeten territories would have to be ceded to Germany. Was it worth setting off a general conflagration under these conditions? And how could the Prague Government believe that the Western Powers would cheerfully engage in such an adventure?

But if Hitler refused to yield, Beneš did not want to bow any more than he did. He confined himself to answering Newton:

“My efforts to find a solution to the Sudeten problem have been superhuman. My conscience is clear. Errors may perhaps have been committed on both sides. But none is of such a nature as to justify so heavy a penalty.”

This reply, which foreshadowed a new refusal, dis-

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. This plan was as follows: 1) On 1 October, German troops would occupy the territories of Asch and Eger located in front of the fortified line. 2) On 3 October, Czechoslovak, British, and German plenipotentiaries would meet in a Sudeten town. Simultaneously, a tripartite conference would fix the frontiers. If possible, the Sudeten territories would be occupied by the British Legion and symbolic detachments of the English Army. 3) On 10 October, German troops would occupy the zone delimited by the International Commission. The whole territory to be ceded to Germany would be handed over to the Reich by 31 October at the latest. 4) The plenipotentiaries would decide whether, in certain zones, it was necessary to resort to plebiscites or to proceed to frontier rectifications. 5) As soon as possible, Germany, Great Britain, France, and Czechoslovakia would begin negotiations with a view to the demobilization of the Czech Army, the guarantee of the new frontiers, and the neutralization of Czechoslovakia.

This plan, as can be seen, was a compromise among the Franco-British plan, the Czechoslovak point of view, and the German Memorandum. The full text can be found in Documents on British Foreign Policy, II, 1140.

HISTORY OF THE GERMAN ARMY, V: THE TRIALS OF STRENGTH (1938)
Benoist-Méchin

English translation — Section 10 of 10
PDF pages 475–540
Translation note: rapid, accuracy-focused translation from the corrected embedded text layer. No new OCR was performed. Page markers from the source text are preserved.

[[PDF page 475]]

...sharply affects the Prime Minister. How long will Beneš go on playing the irreconcilable? Does he believe he can count indefinitely on the aid of the British Empire? Since he does not take his warnings seriously, he is going to make him feel the full extent of his mistake. For this purpose, at 8 p.m. he gives a new radio speech. It is a heartrending appeal to reason and peace, and at the same time an undisguised warning to Prague.

Chamberlain begins by describing the horrors of war. Then, while blaming Hitler’s intransigence, which he calls “unreasonable,” he notes the fact that the Chancellor has declared that the return of the Sudetens to the Reich is the last territorial claim he has to formulate in Europe.

“For my part,” he continues, “I am ready to try everything. I would not hesitate to undertake a third journey to Germany if I thought it could be of any use. It is horrible, fantastic, incredible to think that we are digging trenches and trying on gas masks because of a quarrel that has arisen in a faraway country, between people of whom we know nothing!... I gave the order a little while ago for the mobilization of our fleet, but I wish to make clear that the defense measures taken by His Majesty’s Government are strictly preventive in character... Whatever our sympathy for a small people struggling with a powerful neighbor, there is no question of our dragging the British Empire into war for that little nation alone. If we had to fight, it would have to be for more important causes... War is a terrible thing, and before we commit ourselves to it we must be certain that truly essential issues are at stake. So long as war has not begun, hope remains of preventing it, and you know that I shall work for peace until the last moment.”

It is late at night when a translation of this speech is brought to Hitler. Has the tone used by Chamberlain touched him? Or has he sensed that the British Prime Minister was beginning to distance himself from Beneš?

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. These phrases, wounding to Czech pride, are listened to at the Hradčany with real consternation. Following the publication of the Foreign Office communiqué, Beneš had thought it advisable to stiffen his position. He suddenly sees that he has been mistaken. He interprets Chamberlain’s speech as proof that England will not fight for Czechoslovakia. The man in the street reacts in the same way.

In any case, Hitler thinks it advisable to send Chamberlain one final message. In it he refutes, point by point, the arguments opposed by the Czechs to his Memorandum; points out that, from a territorial point of view, there is not so very much difference between his text and the Franco-British plan; repeats that he is ready to guarantee the new frontiers of Czechoslovakia as soon as the problem of all the minorities has been settled; and ends with these words:

“In the light of these considerations, I leave it to you to judge whether it is proper to continue your efforts on behalf of peace — efforts for which I wish once again to thank you sincerely — in order to defeat the machinations of the Prague Government and bring it back to reason at the very last hour.”

The dawn of 28 September rises. Peace is now only a small lamp going out. If by 2 p.m. the Czech plenipotentiaries have not presented themselves in Berlin... But what is the use of repeating what has already been said a hundred times? The remaining deadlines are so short, and the chances of agreement so slight, that it seems impossible that war can be avoided...

Yet at the moment when everything seems lost, an unexpected voice is raised. It is Roosevelt’s. At four in the morning, he sends a message to Hitler, which reaches him around 9:45.

“In the name of one hundred and thirty million Americans,” writes the President of the United States, “I address to you the most urgent appeal that you not break off negotiations, but seek a peaceful settlement... My Government has no political commitment in Europe and does not intend to assume any obligation in the conduct of the present negotiations... If you do not succeed in reaching an understanding with the Czechs, there is nothing to prevent the widening of the conversations by means of a conference of all the nations directly interested in the present controversy...

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Roosevelt had already addressed a first “peace message” to Hitler on 26 September, at one in the morning. Hitler replied by declaring that it was to Prague, and not to him, that the head of the White House should address his admonitions.

[[PDF page 477]]

“If you consented to a peaceful solution of this kind, hundreds of thousands of men throughout the world would recognize, I am convinced, that this gesture on your part surpasses the services rendered in the entire history of humanity.”

“This exhortation,” Bonnet tells us, “was greeted with enthusiasm throughout the world. In France, the whole press, from Léon Blum, socialist, to Émile Roche, radical, and Georges Bidault, Christian Democrat, invited the Government to support the proposals of the great President.”

The idea of a “summit” conference appears to everyone like a ray of light, like the last means of averting the peril.

But will Hitler lend himself to it? When, the previous evening at 11 p.m., Sir Nevile Henderson had presented himself at the Wilhelmstrasse to obtain approval of Chamberlain’s new plan, M. von Weizsäcker, after reading it quickly, had made a face and had not concealed from him that it had little chance of being accepted. Discouraged, the British ambassador had telephoned London to advise the simple and outright adoption of the Godesberg Memorandum...

Several facts had prompted Roosevelt to send this message. First, an editorial in the New York Times, published a few days earlier, in which one reads: “President Roosevelt must follow the magnificent precedent established by Mr. Neville Chamberlain. He must appeal personally to Chancellor Hitler in view of a conference of European chiefs. By going to Berchtesgaden, Mr. Chamberlain obtained the unanimous approval of his people. Knowing the people of the United States and the sincerity with which they have worked for international friendship, we think that Mr. Roosevelt would be invested with an equally universal mandate.”

Next, a report from Mr. Bullitt saying to him: “I believe that all the members of our Government and all the officials of the various departments would do well to refrain from any declaration suggesting that we think France ought to enter the war solely in order to maintain 3,200,000 Sudetens under the domination of 7 million Czechs. It is perfectly honorable to push another nation into war when one is oneself resolved to enter it immediately at its side. But I can conceive of nothing more immoral than pushing it into war when one is resolved not to take part oneself. Now I am convinced that the American people are firmly decided not to make war on Germany.”

Finally, there was a message from Georges Bonnet, suggesting that the President of the United States invite Germany, England, France, Italy, and Poland to meet in conference at The Hague. Roosevelt — who had already proposed a conference of this kind in January 1938, but had been rebuffed by Chamberlain — had only one desire: to preside over an international conference in which he would play the role of supreme arbiter of peace. That is why he sends Chamberlain, Daladier, and Mussolini a copy of the message that he addresses to Hitler.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
3. This is the plan including a timetable for the evacuation by the Czechs of the Sudeten lands and designated in the British documents under the name Time Table.

[[PDF page 478]]

Throughout the night of 27 to 28 September, the Foreign Office and the Quai d'Orsay display feverish activity. They try to use the last hours remaining to them to put together an acceptable arrangement. Parallel to Chamberlain, Bonnet frames a French plan: it consists of ceding to Germany, as of 1 October, all the territories provided for by the Franco-British plan and of immediately putting the International Commission in place. Around midnight, he gets in touch with François-Poncet and instructs him to submit this plan to the Führer as quickly as possible. From that moment, telephone calls and démarches cross and accelerate. In Berlin and Rome, the ambassadors take turns, attentive to the slightest gleam of hope.

Especially in Rome, for it is toward the Palazzo Venezia that all eyes are now turning. Is not the only man capable of stopping Hitler on the slope toward war Mussolini? After having wanted to keep him at arm's length, Lord Perth in the name of Great Britain and Roosevelt in the name of the American people beg him to intervene.

In truth, the Duce had been awaiting this moment impatiently. Had Hitler not contracted a debt of gratitude toward him on the day when Mussolini did not oppose the Anschluss? Moreover, the Führer, who has the highest esteem for his political insight, willingly accepts his advice. Mussolini, for his part, despite the bellicose speeches he has delivered at Trieste and Udine, has no desire to see a war break out into which he would inevitably be drawn — and especially not a war for Czechoslovakia. Nor does he have any interest in letting Germany triumph alone by force of arms. What he wants is to appear to the world as the savior of peace, while ensuring the victory of the Polish and Hungarian claims.

He therefore accepts without hesitation the role of mediator.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. On 27 September Lord Perth, British ambassador in Rome, suggested to London that it appeal to Mussolini's good offices. At 11 p.m. the Foreign Office approved this initiative. Perth then went to Ciano to tell him that the British Government "would welcome an intervention by Mussolini with Hitler."

3. During the night of 27 to 28, Roosevelt sent a confidential message to the Duce telling him that the United States would be happy to see him use his moderating influence on Hitler and asking him to make every effort to obtain the meeting of a conference. Simultaneously, Mr. Cordell Hull, Secretary of State at the White House, asked all the diplomatic representatives of the American states to support Roosevelt's efforts on behalf of peace. Démarches in this sense were made in Berlin and Prague by Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama. In addition, Bolivia, Brazil, Haiti, Honduras, Paraguay, Peru, the Republic of San Salvador, Uruguay, and Venezuela published declarations approving President Roosevelt's action.

[[PDF page 479]]

The first ambassador to present himself at the Reich Chancellery on the morning of 28 September is François-Poncet. He brings with him the plan that Georges Bonnet has drawn up during the night and which goes much farther than Chamberlain's. A General Staff map is attached to it. Very quickly, his interview with Hitler takes on the aspect of an oratorical duel, a vehement and passionate hand-to-hand struggle for peace.

"You are making a tragic mistake, Mr. Chancellor, if you believe you can confine the conflict to Czechoslovakia," the French ambassador tells him. "If you attack that country, you will set all Europe on fire and blood. You are naturally convinced that you will win this war, just as we believe that we are capable of defeating you. But why are you absolutely determined to run that risk, when you can obtain everything you desire without firing a single shot?"

Despite these pathetic adjurations, Hitler does not wish to yield. Frowning, he again begins to fulminate against Beneš and asserts that it is impossible for him to wait any longer. Schmidt, who attends the scene without taking part in it — for the French ambassador speaks German fluently — is literally fascinated by the extraordinary self-control and diplomatic talent displayed by François-Poncet.

[[PDF page 480]]

His arguments and refutations follow one another with impeccable logic and, although his emotion is intense, he watches every one of his words, for he knows that a single word too many would be enough to provoke the catastrophe. Hitler, for his part, is visibly impressed by the way the ambassador stands up to him and by the ardent conviction with which he defends his point of view. He seems to hesitate. Schmidt has the very clear impression, at that moment, that "in the balance of his mind, the scale of peace begins imperceptibly to outweigh the scale of war."

But then an aide-de-camp comes to interrupt the interview. The Italian ambassador asks to see Hitler immediately. The Führer withdraws into a neighboring room, accompanied by Schmidt, for M. Attolico does not speak German. As soon as he sees Hitler, the Italian ambassador rushes toward him and says to him point-blank, without regard for protocol:

"Führer, I have an urgent message to transmit to you from the Duce!"

The ambassador's face is red. He is breathless. But his intelligent eyes sparkle behind his thick tortoiseshell spectacles.

"The Government of the United Kingdom," he continues in a panting voice, "has just informed Rome, through its ambassador, that it would favorably receive mediation by the Duce in the Sudeten question. It assures us that there are no more than insignificant divergences between the points of view..."

Then, after a few seconds of suspense to recover his breath, he adds:

"Whatever your decision, the Duce has instructed me to tell you that Fascist Italy is wholly at your side. However, he asks you not to precipitate your war preparations and to delay the beginning of operations by twenty-four hours. He will try to use this delay to find the ways and means that would permit an agreement."

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]

1. “François-Poncet is the only one who brought me reasonable proposals that morning,” Hitler would later say. “It was enough to glance at his map to see that it had been drawn up by soldiers who knew their profession well.”

[[PDF page 481]]

Hitler, already shaken by François-Poncet’s words, remains thoughtful before this message. One feels that thoughts are jostling in his head. It is noon. In two hours, the deadline fixed for the Czechs will have expired. Everyone holds his breath, knowing that the fate of Europe will be decided in the coming seconds.

After a moment of silence, Hitler replies in a calm voice:

“Tell the Duce that I accept his proposal.”

While Attolico returns to his embassy to transmit this reply to Mussolini, Hitler and Schmidt return to the great salon, where François-Poncet is speaking with Ribbentrop while awaiting their return.

“Mussolini has just asked me to accept his mediation,” Hitler announces briefly, before resuming the conversation with François-Poncet. But one feels that his thought is elsewhere. Visibly, Mussolini’s message interests him far more than anything the French ambassador can say to him. The interview ends all the more quickly because François-Poncet too is in a hurry: he is eager to communicate this news to the Quai d’Orsay.

Hardly has the French ambassador withdrawn when Sir Nevile Henderson is announced. He is carrying a new message from Chamberlain:

“After having read your last letter attentively,” the British Prime Minister writes to him, “I have acquired the conviction that the essential part of your demands can be satisfied immediately and without war. I am ready to come to Berlin at once to confer with you on the modalities of the transfer, together with the representatives of Czechoslovakia, France, and Italy. I refuse to believe that you would take upon yourself the responsibility of unleashing a world war that may mean the end of civilization, solely in order to avoid a delay of a few days.”

When Schmidt has finished translating this letter, the British ambassador explains to the Führer, in broad outline, the new British plan. But Hitler refuses to enter into discussion.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. This is the plan whose essence is indicated above, p. 470, note 1.

[[PDF page 482]]

“Before answering you, I must consult Mussolini,” he declares. “Besides, at the request of my great Italian ally, I have decided to postpone the order for general mobilization by twenty-four hours.”

Hearing these words, Henderson heaves a sigh of relief. It is 1:10 p.m. The ultimatum that was to expire in fifty minutes is extended until the next day. Many things can still happen in the interval...

At the beginning of the afternoon, after an interview with Neurath, Hitler has a long telephone conversation with Mussolini. He has to interrupt it for a moment to receive M. Attolico. The Italian ambassador brings him a second message from the Duce:

“Führer, I thank you for having accepted my proposal to delay mobilization by twenty-four hours.

“By the personal telegram which he addressed to me asking me to intervene with you, Mr. Chamberlain has informed me of the contents of the letter that he had delivered to you today, 28 September.

“This letter, which may perhaps be published and whose text I transmit to you for all practical purposes, contains suggestions that I believe may be retained, especially that of a new journey by Chamberlain to Berlin to discuss the question with us, if you wish, as well as with the French and the Italians.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. In Rome, Lord Perth, who remained at the Palazzo Chigi to await news, was in such a state of nervous tension that when Ciano announced to him that the German mobilization had been delayed by twenty-four hours, he burst into loud laughter mingled with sobs and rushed to his car to return to his embassy.

2. According to Fritz Wiedemann, the interview with Neurath took place in the winter garden of the Chancellery immediately after François-Poncet’s departure. The dialogue reportedly unfolded as follows:
Neurath. — My Führer, do you then want war at any price?
Hitler. — What do you mean by “at any price”? Of course not!
Neurath. — Then everything can be arranged. There is really no more reason to unleash a world war. You yourself set the date of 1 October for the cession of the Sudeten territories. That date must naturally be maintained. But you cannot occupy the whole country in one day. So do it in stages. Chamberlain’s plan, which Mussolini supports, provides you with the means and will thus make it possible to arrive at an agreement.

“It goes without saying that Italy is ready to take part in this meeting.

“I am convinced that you will now obtain a success that I do not hesitate to call grandiose, both from the concrete point of view and from that of your prestige in the world.”

“I accept the conference plan that Mussolini proposes to me,” Hitler replies, “but on condition that the Duce attend it personally.”

M. Attolico having answered in the affirmative, Hitler resumes his telephone conversation with Rome. The two dictators agree on the arrangements and the place of the meeting. After this, Hitler hangs up the receiver and calls M. von Weizsäcker.

“Please send telegrams to Chamberlain, Daladier, and Mussolini,” he says, “inviting them to come and confer with me tomorrow morning in Munich.”

The German invitation reaches London under conditions that further heighten the dramatic character of this day.

Chamberlain is delivering a speech before the House of Commons. He began speaking at 2:55 p.m. in order to explain to the deputies all the episodes of the crisis. He has reached the moment when Hitler declared to Sir Horace Wilson: “Either the Czechs will accept my conditions, or it will be war; I await their reply on 28 September before 2 p.m.,” when Sir John Simon hands him a telegram. Chamberlain interrupts his speech, slowly runs his eyes over it, and several times passes his hand across his forehead. For an instant, he appears to stagger under the emotion. Some deputies look at their watches: it is 3:40. Since they do not yet know that a twenty-four-hour reprieve has been obtained — for Chamberlain was interrupted at the precise moment when he was about to reach that phase of his account — most of them think that hostilities have broken out between the Reich and Czechoslovakia.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. As can be seen, Mussolini excludes from the outset any Czech participation.

2. Speech by Ciano on 30 November 1938 before the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations.

3. It is not impossible that Mussolini pointed out to Hitler that it was necessary to act quickly, that Roosevelt was preparing to convene a conference from which neither the Czechs nor the Russians could be excluded, and that it would be better for the Führer to cut the ground from under him by convening one himself. Hitler chose Munich as being halfway between London and Rome.

[[PDF page 484]]

Yet the Prime Minister pulls himself together and continues in a vibrant voice:

“That is not all! I have still something to communicate to the House. I have just been informed by Chancellor Hitler that he invites me to meet him tomorrow morning in Munich. He has also invited MM. Daladier and Mussolini. Mussolini has already accepted. I have every reason to think that M. Daladier will do the same. I need not tell you what my reply will be...”

“God bless the Prime Minister!” cries a voice at the back of the room.

“I can say no more,” adds Chamberlain at the height of emotion. “I am sure that the honorable House will not wish to detain me any longer, so as to allow me to go and see what I can make of this final effort.”

Then an indescribable ovation rises from all the benches, an ovation such as the vaults of the Palace of Westminster have rarely heard.

Almost at the same hour, M. Potemkin, vice-commissar of the People for Foreign Affairs, is speaking in the Kremlin with the Reich ambassador, M. von der Schulenburg.

“All the nations that have taken part in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia will repent of it one day,” he says to him with irritation. “Soon it will be Poland’s turn, with its numerous Germans; then that of Ukraine and finally that of Italy with South Tyrol.

“To settle the Czechoslovak problem, the Soviet Union has always advocated the meeting of an international conference in which all interested countries would participate, on the model of the one proposed by President Roosevelt. But it can only disapprove of a Four-Power meeting that will dictate peace to Europe.”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Moscow sees in the convening of an international conference such as Roosevelt proposed the last possibility of breaking its isolation. It will give its agreement the next morning, 29 September, probably at Prague’s urging. But it will be too late. Daladier, Chamberlain, and Mussolini will already have agreed to go to Munich.

[[PDF page 485]]

In Prague, the announcement of the conference has caused a movement of panic. The generals, the chiefs of the Sokols, the veterans of the Siberian campaign who were preparing to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Republic come to beg Beneš to show himself inflexible and to declare war on Germany. But Beneš refuses. The Western Powers would not support him, and an isolated war would amount to suicide...

Everywhere else, however, the news of the meeting of the Four unleashes an explosion of enthusiasm. From Washington, Roosevelt cables Chamberlain: “Good man!” despite his vexation at having arrived too late. In Geneva, the Council of the League of Nations meets urgently to approve an attempt at conciliation which it should itself have taken the initiative in making, but in which it has had no part. In Paris, Léon Blum writes: “The announcement of the Munich meeting has aroused an immense movement of joy and hope. It would be a grave mistake to thwart in any way this hope and this joy, which are in themselves a force of peace... The Munich meeting is an armful of wood thrown into the sacred hearth at the moment when the flame was falling and threatening to go out...”

And until late into the night, considerable crowds gathered in Trafalgar Square and on the Piazza Venezia, fearing that they would be awakened the next day by the thunder of cannon, frantically acclaim the names of Mussolini and Chamberlain and tirelessly chant:

“Peace! Peace! Peace!...”

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
3. Beneš claims to have told them: “A second European war will inevitably come. Then the Western Powers, which refuse today to fight for Czechoslovakia, will be obliged to do so in conditions far worse, and without Czechoslovakia...” But this appears subject to caution, since Beneš’s Memoirs were written in 1942, at a moment when the Second World War had already broken out.

[[PDF page 486]]

XXIII
THE MUNICH CONFERENCE
(29–30 September 1938)

On 29 September, in the first hours of the day, Hitler travels by train to Kufstein to welcome Mussolini. At 9:30, he boards the Duce's salon coach and quickly agrees with him on two essential points: 1) the conference must not at any price be allowed to bog down in the thicket of procedure. It must reach a solution the same day, otherwise he will resort to arms. 2) Whatever concessions on points of detail he may consent to, German troops must enter Sudeten territory on 1 October. This is a demand he will not abandon.

Then the two dictators proceed to a political and military examination of the situation. Unfolding a map of Eastern Europe on which Czechoslovakia no longer appears, Hitler reveals for the first time to Mussolini his plans for expansion in the east. He makes him understand that the settlement of the Sudeten question is only a first stage in their realization and that the fact of having accepted the meeting of a conference in no way means that he has renounced them. He concludes by saying:

"We shall succumb to encirclement if we do not attack in time!"

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Before the Anschluss, Kufstein was the frontier station between Bavaria and Austria. Hitler has instructed Rudolf Hess to go and greet the Duce at the Brenner frontier.

2. The head of the Italian Government left Rome the previous evening at six o'clock.

The Duce is both troubled and reassured by these declarations: troubled, because he has no desire to be drawn into a war; reassured because these plans prove to him that the Führer nourishes no Mediterranean ambition.

When the two special trains carrying Hitler and Mussolini arrive in Munich, the French and British delegations have already preceded them there. Daladier arrived by airplane at 11:25. Chamberlain lands half an hour later. After reviewing a company of the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler that renders them honors, the two statesmen are conducted by Ribbentrop to the hotels where apartments have been reserved for them for the duration of the conference.

The previous evening, at 6:45, the Prime Minister sent a message to Beneš officially informing him of the Munich meeting. Beneš immediately replied: "I earnestly ask you not to decide anything at Munich without Czechoslovakia having been able to be heard." But as he receives no answer and realizes that the Czech delegates will be excluded from the deliberations, on the morning of the 29th he sends a new telegram to London specifying "that the Czechoslovak Government would not participate in this conference, although it remained ready to associate itself with an international meeting where Germany, Czechoslovakia, and other nations would be represented."

Thus the Czechoslovak delegation, composed of M. Mastny, Czechoslovak minister in Berlin, and Dr. Hubert Masaryk, of the Prague Foreign Ministry, arrives in Munich only at 3 p.m. in order to show clearly that it intends to keep its distance from the discussion. No notable person troubles himself to greet it at the airport. A simple police car takes it to the Regina Palace.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. He is accompanied by MM. Alexis Léger, Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs; Rochat, director of

European Affairs; Clappier, director of his Cabinet; and an orderly officer. Georges Bonnet remained in Paris.

2. He is accompanied by Sir Horace Wilson, W. Malkin, legal adviser to the Foreign Office, W. Strang, Ashton-Gwatkin, and Lord Dunglass. Lord Halifax also remained in London, so that the only two foreign ministers attending the conference will be Ribbentrop and Ciano. A train brought from Berlin at the beginning of the morning Sir Nevile Henderson, M. Attolico, M. François-Poncet, and Colonel Stehlin, the French air attaché.

3. Daladier settles at the Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten; Chamberlain at the Regina Palace Hotel.

[[PDF page 488]]

This gives Dr. Masaryk the impression “of being treated like a suspect, assigned to supervised residence.”

Count Csáky also arrives, as observer of the Hungarian Government. But no one has time to concern himself with him, so he is taken in hand by the Italian delegation.

The conference, originally convened for 11 o’clock, had to be delayed. It opens only at 12:45. But in reality it is now only a formality: all the essential decisions had been taken the day before, either during the Hitler-Attolico conversations, or during the telephone conversation Hitler had with Mussolini, or else that very morning, in the train that brought the two dictators from Kufstein to Munich.

One after another, the foreign delegations are introduced into the hall of the Führerbau, where all the standards of the Free Corps and the emblems of the Party are displayed. The central headquarters of the National Socialist Movement is a vast building located on Königsplatz, directly opposite the two small temples with square pilasters where, in bronze coffins, rest the sixteen National Socialist militants killed on 9 November 1923, during the shooting in front of the Feldherrnhalle.

Six months earlier, when Hitler entered Austria, he had gone to Linz to the tomb of his parents and to his former history teacher, to renew contact with the memories of his childhood and youth. Now he has only to look around him to recall the beginnings of his political career. Was it not in Munich, indeed, in a small smoke-filled brasserie, that on 19 September 1919 he joined the German Workers’ Party, a completely unknown little group of six members at whose head he launched himself on the conquest of Germany? And now, nineteen years later, almost to the day, having become Chancellor of the Reich and Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, he welcomes at the threshold of his office, beside the Roman dictator,

the heads of the French and British Governments whom he has brought this far in order to make his will known to them! How many men can boast of having traveled such a road?

[[PDF page 489]]

Daladier, Chamberlain, Mussolini, Alexis Léger, Sir Horace Wilson, Ribbentrop, Ciano, and the interpreter Schmidt enter Hitler’s office and take their places without any protocol on sofas and armchairs arranged around a low table. Each of the heads of government begins by setting out his point

of view on the Sudeten question. Since all are anxious to show goodwill, the conversation is relaxed. It takes on a sharper tone only when Hitler again begins to vituperate against Beneš and the Czechs. But Daladier counters him with great liveliness.

Although the discussion never becomes violent, a few clashes occur between Hitler and Chamberlain. As a former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the British Prime Minister wishes to know how the Czech state will be indemnified for the public buildings located in the territories to be ceded to Germany.

“There will be no indemnity,” Hitler retorts in a surly tone. “These buildings were constructed either before the war by the Austrian Government — and I do not know that Prague ever indemnified it — or since the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic. In that case, it was the Sudetens who paid for them with their taxes...”

But Chamberlain returns to the charge. He worries about what will become of the livestock. Will the cows remain entirely where they are, or may they be brought back in part into Czechoslovakia?

“Our time is truly too precious to waste discussing such trifles,” Hitler replies with a gesture of impatience.

After that, the Prime Minister twice asks that representatives of the Czech Government be admitted to take part in the debates.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. These interventions by Chamberlain should be seen as an echo of the Czech note of 25 September, in which the Prague Government complained that Czech nationals who would be included in the Sudeten territories but who refused to accept the National Socialist regime “would have to leave their homes without taking any of their belongings, not even their cows if they are agricultural populations.” This complaint visibly impressed the Prime Minister.

But Hitler opposes this in categorical terms.

In general, Hitler feels more sympathy for Daladier than for his British counterpart. He finds him both simpler and more direct.

“I get on very well with Daladier,” he will later say to Mussolini. “He is a former combatant of the front, like us. One can have a reasonable conversation with him.”

At this point the Duce draws a “compromise draft” from his pocket. Is it an Italian draft, as was long believed? Not at all. It had been drawn up the day before at the Berlin Chancellery by Göring, Neurath, and Weizsäcker — without Ribbentrop’s knowledge. After showing it to Hitler, Göring transmitted it to Attolico, who telephoned its contents to Mussolini just as the latter was preparing to take the train for Munich. It is therefore a German plan on which the French and British delegations are going to have to pronounce.

It takes up almost point by point the Godesberg conditions. But none of the negotiators present seems to have noticed this.

Daladier “welcomes favorably the Duce’s proposal, drafted in an objective and realistic spirit”; Chamberlain also approves it and declares “that he himself had envisaged a quite similar solution”; Sir Nevile Henderson thinks “that Mussolini has presented as his own, with much tact, a combination of Hitler’s proposals and those of the Anglo-French”; François-Poncet has the impression that the members of the conference are working “from a British memorandum drafted by Sir Horace Wilson.” At 3 p.m. the session is suspended to allow the delegations to have lunch.

When it resumes an hour later, the number of those attending has considerably increased.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Schmidt immediately recognizes this text because Göring had asked him to prepare a French version of it twenty-four hours earlier. It was drawn up outside Ribbentrop’s knowledge because its authors feared that the Reich Foreign Minister — hostile to conciliation — would insert clauses into it that would make it unacceptable.

[[PDF page 491]]

Besides the Four Great Powers, Léger, Sir Horace Wilson, Ribbentrop, and Ciano, there are Göring, François-Poncet, Rochat, Sir Nevile Henderson, Attolico, State Secretary von Weizsäcker, legal advisers, secretaries, and aides-de-camp. The conversation continues in a very animated but disjointed fashion, for no one presides and no agenda has been established. Everyone speaks at once. Small groups form in the window embrasures to exchange their impressions. Hitler has a long aside with Daladier, while Chamberlain talks with Mussolini.

Toward 9 p.m., Hitler invites all those present to a dinner that has been prepared in the great reception hall of the Führerbau. But neither Daladier nor Chamberlain is in the mood to banquet. They decline this invitation on the pretext that they must go to their hotel to make contact with London and Paris. Mussolini and Hitler will therefore dine alone with their entourages, at the end of an immense table glittering with silverware and crystal, which remains half empty.

After this second interruption, the session resumes at 11 p.m. There remains only to settle certain points of detail. At half past midnight, the definitive text is finally ready. It says:

Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy, taking into account the arrangement already reached in principle for the cession to Germany of the territories of the Sudeten Germans, have agreed on the following provisions and conditions regulating the said cession and the measures it entails.

Each of them, by this agreement, undertakes to take the necessary steps to ensure its execution.

1. The evacuation shall begin on 1 October.

2. The United Kingdom, France, and Italy agree that the evacuation of the territories in question must be completed by 10 October, without any of the existing installations having been destroyed. The Czechoslovak Government shall have responsibility for carrying out this evacuation without any damage resulting to the said installations.

3. The conditions of this evacuation shall be determined in detail by an International Commission

composed of representatives of Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Czechoslovakia.

4. The progressive occupation by Reich troops of the territories with a German predominance shall begin on 1 October.

[[PDF page 492]]

The four zones indicated on the attached map shall be occupied by German troops in the following order:

Zone I, on 1 and 2 October;
Zone II, on 2 and 3 October;
Zone III, on 3, 4, and 5 October;
Zone IV, on 6 and 7 October.

The other territories with a German predominance shall be determined by the International Commission and occupied by German troops by 10 October.

5. The International Commission mentioned in paragraph 3 shall determine the territories where a plebiscite is to be held. These territories shall be occupied by international contingents until the completion of the plebiscite. This Commission shall also fix the conditions under which the plebiscite is to be instituted, taking as its basis the conditions of the Saar plebiscite. It shall also fix a date for the opening of the plebiscite, which may not be later than the end of November.

6. The final fixing of the frontiers shall be established by the International Commission. This Commission shall also have competence to recommend to the four Powers — Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy — in certain exceptional cases, modifications of limited scope to the strictly ethnic determination of the zones transferable without a plebiscite.

7. There shall be a right of option allowing one to be included in the transferred territories or excluded from them.

This option shall be exercised within a period of six months from the date of the present agreement. A German-Czechoslovak Commission shall fix the details of this option, examine the means of facilitating exchanges of populations, and settle the questions of principle raised by the said exchanges.

8. The Czechoslovak Government shall release, within four weeks from the conclusion of the present agreement, all Sudeten Germans belonging to Czechoslovak military or police formations who desire this release.

Within the same period, the Czechoslovak Government shall release Sudeten German prisoners who are serving prison sentences for political offenses.

Munich, 29 September 1938.

Annexes to the Agreement.

Annex I. — His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom and the French Government have

concluded the above agreement on the understanding that they maintain the offer contained

[[PDF page 494]]

in the Franco-British proposals of 19 September 1938 concerning an international guarantee of the new frontiers of the Czechoslovak state against any unprovoked aggression.

When the question of the Polish and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia has been settled, Germany and Italy, for their part, will also give a guarantee to Czechoslovakia.

Annex II. — The heads of the Governments of the four Powers declare that the problem of the Polish and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia, if it is not settled within three months by agreement between the interested Governments, shall be the subject of another meeting of the heads of the Governments of the four Powers assembled today.

While the secretaries and interpreters finish putting this text into fair copy and translating it into four languages, General Bodenschatz, one of Göring's aides-de-camp, looks at his wristwatch and says in a low voice to Colonel Stehlin:

"To think that if this agreement had not been reached, at this very hour our squadrons of Heinkels, Dorniers, and Junkers would be pulverizing the Czech fortifications and the towns of Bohemia under their bombs..."

On 30 September, at 1:30 in the morning, the Munich Agreement is signed. It is enough to read the text to realize that the Führer has won all along the line: the occupation of the Sudeten territories will begin on 1 October; the Czechs will deliver all installations intact; the advance guards of the Wehrmacht will cross the frontier on the fixed date...

But the most painful task still remains: informing the Czechs of the signing of the agreement. Daladier having refused to carry it out alone, it has been agreed that the démarche will be made collectively.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. It was Mussolini who insisted, from Munich, that the problem of the Polish and Hungarian minorities be expressly mentioned in the text of the agreement.

3. Two Annexes follow (III and IV), concerning the competences and composition of the International Commission.

[[PDF page 495]]

"I am going to a dying man to bring him extreme unction," says François-Poncet, "but I do not even have oil to pour on his wounds."

Immobilized since 3:30 p.m. at the Regina Hotel, the two representatives of the Prague Government are waiting to know the sentence that will be pronounced against them. No one has come to see them; no one has kept them informed of the debates. Around 7 p.m., M. Ashton-Gwatkin, who had belonged to the Runciman mission and who now forms part of Chamberlain's entourage, brought them some

information. He returned at 10 p.m., accompanied by a Foreign Office official, to inform them that a general agreement was on the point of being concluded.

“I cannot yet give you the details,” he told them, “but it is much harsher than the Franco-British plan.”

MM. Mastny and Masaryk then protested, unfolding the maps and statistics they had brought with them.

“Do you realize,” they cried, “that if you accept Hitler’s conditions, some 800,000 Czechs will find themselves included within the new German frontiers?”

But the British remained indifferent. The Czech statistics no longer interested them...

During the evening, the two Czechoslovak delegates were taken to the Führerbau, where they were made to wait in a room adjoining the one where the conference was being held. At 1:35 in the morning, Sir Horace Wilson and M. Ashton-Gwatkin came to read them the terms of the agreement.

“It is abominable,” moaned M. Masaryk, “you are surely not going to...”

But Sir Horace Wilson left the room without even giving him time to finish his sentence. As for Ashton-Gwatkin, he confined himself to saying to them:

“If you do not accept, you will be obliged to settle your affairs all alone with the Germans. Perhaps the French will tell you this with more tact, but you can believe me: they share our views and have no further interest in the question.”

A few moments later, the Czech delegates are

[[PDF page 496]]

introduced into the room where the conference was held. Daladier, Chamberlain, Sir Horace Wilson, Alexis Léger, and Ashton-Gwatkin stand around the low table. Mussolini and Hitler have withdrawn into an adjoining salon. They consider that this formality does not concern them, and that it is up to France and England to notify their friends.

The atmosphere is heavy. The French are visibly nervous. Chamberlain keeps yawning. After delivering a very short address, he hands M. Mastny the text of the agreement, as well as a map on which the territories to be evacuated are marked.

“Do you expect an answer or a declaration from our Government?” the Czechoslovak minister in Berlin asks him.

“The four statesmen do not have much time,” replies Alexis Léger in a brusque tone. “Moreover, they consider the agreement accepted. It is a judgment without appeal. It is not susceptible of any modification.”

As the Czech delegates withdraw in silence, Hitler and Mussolini return to the room to take leave of Chamberlain and Daladier. At the moment of parting, the British Prime Minister says to the Führer:

“Excellency, before leaving Munich, I should like to have another interview with you.”

Hitler seems surprised. He hesitates for an instant, then accepts with a smile. An appointment is fixed for 1:30 p.m.

Then the door of Hitler’s office opens wide. The Führer exchanges a last handshake with the heads of the foreign Governments and slowly descends the stairs beside Mussolini. A gleam of triumph shines in his eyes.

Daladier and Chamberlain follow close behind him. They look exhausted. Ribbentrop escorts them back to the gate of the Führerbau. On Königsplatz, a company of honor presents arms. The drums roll. Cheers rise from the crowd massed around the cenotaphs where the dead of 9 November rest.

The two statesmen get into cars to return to their hotels. The cheers rise toward them throughout the journey,

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Report by Dr. Hubert Masaryk to his Government.

[[PDF page 497]]

for the streets are black with people. Most of the Munich residents have stayed up to await the end of the conference. The Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten and the Regina Palace are literally besieged. Daladier and Chamberlain have to appear on their balconies to greet the crowd. An interminable ovation greets their appearance, while armfuls of flowers pile up in the halls of their respective residences.

As soon as he returns to his room, Chamberlain addresses the following message to M. Newton:

“Please see President Beneš immediately to urge him to ratify the plan that has been worked out today after prolonged discussion, in view of avoiding a conflict. You will make him understand that this is no longer the moment for discussion. His answer must be a pure and simple acceptance.”

On 30 September, at six in the morning, Dr. Hencke, the Reich chargé d’affaires in Prague, pulls the Czech Foreign Minister out of bed in order to present him with the decisions of the conference. He informs him that Czechoslovakia is invited to send three representatives to the Commission charged with supervising the execution of the agreement, which is to meet in Berlin that very evening at 5 p.m.

Immediately, Beneš, Syrový, and the members of the Cabinet shut themselves up in the Hradčany to deliberate. They are still sitting at 12:30 when the ministers of France, Great Britain, and Italy present themselves to M. Krofta to learn the reply of the Czechoslovak Government.

“In the name of the President of the Republic and of my Government,” the Foreign Minister declares to them, “I inform you that we submit to the decisions taken at Munich without even having been consulted. Our point of view will be transmitted to you in writing. For the moment, I have nothing to add. However, I wish to draw your attention

[[PDF page 498]]

to the fact that it is indispensable to convince the German Government to stop the campaign of incitement that it is pursuing against us by radio and in the press, without which it will be impossible to apply the Munich program without bloodshed. I do not wish to indulge in recriminations, but for us this is a catastrophe we had not deserved. Nevertheless, we submit and shall strive to ensure a peaceful life for our people..."

As the French minister begins to present the condolences of his Government, M. Krofta stops him:

"I do not know whether your countries will profit from the decisions they have taken at Munich," he replies to him haughtily, "but I know with certainty that we shall not be the last. Others will be struck after us!"

At 4:30 p.m., General Krejčí, Commander-in-Chief, addresses the Czech Army to recommend that it remain disciplined:

"Officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers! In another time of turmoil, your elders displayed exemplary courage and perseverance. Imitate their example! Do not add to the misfortunes of the fatherland by giving your compatriots the image of discord or indiscipline. Keep confidence in your chiefs, and faithfully execute the orders they will give you in the coming hours. Only in this way shall we overcome this ordeal."

At 5 p.m., General Syrový in turn takes the floor on the radio to address a message to the Czech people. His speech is a vibrant appeal to unity and hope. But in the final analysis it amounts to an acknowledgment of impotence:

"We can only bow," he declares, "while protesting before the face of the world against the treatment inflicted upon us. We have been abandoned! We are alone!"

Does he realize that he is repeating, almost word for word,

[[PDF page 499]]

the cry of distress uttered by Admiral Kolchak when he delivered him to the revolutionary committee of Irkutsk?

Yet the cup is not yet full. The same evening at midnight — as if all the vindictiveness of history were awakening at once — M. Papée, the Polish minister in Prague, hands M. Krofta an ultimatum ordering the Czech Government to evacuate the territory of Teschen within twelve hours, failing which the Polish Government will declare war on it.

At the point where it stands, what can the Czech Government do, except bend its back under this additional humiliation? The occupation of Teschen by Polish troops will therefore begin on 2 October, since such is the will of Colonel Beck...

Certainly, the way in which the Czechs annexed this territory in 1920 had been far from glorious. But the Polish ultimatum, coming at this precise moment, too closely resembles a kick at the fallen to avoid

provoking a feeling of disapproval.

While these scenes are unfolding in Prague, Chamberlain pays Hitler the visit that had been agreed upon before his departure from the Führerbau. The interview takes place in Hitler's private residence, with no witness other than the interpreter Schmidt.

The Prime Minister is in a state of fatigue expressed not by lassitude but by feverish loquacity. He begins by asking the Führer to show generosity in the application of the Munich agreements.

"Let us hope that the Czechs will be reasonable enough not to create incidents," he says to him. "If any nevertheless occur, I beg you not to bombard Prague, for that would inevitably involve terrible losses among women and children."

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
3. "Now, the day Hitler attacks Poland, I shall shout: Sieg Heil," writes the English polemicist King-Hall.

[[PDF page 500]]

Hitler is in a gloomy mood that contrasts with the satisfaction he had shown the previous day. With a distracted ear he listens to Chamberlain, for more than half an hour, pour out disjointed remarks on the Spanish war, the withdrawal of Italian and German volunteers, general disarmament, the promotion of economic prosperity in the world, and a certain number of other subjects that in no way correspond to his concerns of the moment. Finally, the Prime Minister takes a sheet of paper from his briefcase.

"I drafted this declaration this morning," he tells him. "I hope you will be willing to sign it with me. I think it would be good to make it public immediately."

Hitler reads the text Chamberlain hands him. It is a draft joint resolution, conceived in these terms:

We, the Führer-Chancellor of Germany and the Prime Minister of Great Britain, following a new conversation that we have had today, agree in recognizing that the question of Anglo-German relations is of prime importance for the two countries and for Europe.

We consider the agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement as the symbols of the desire of our two peoples never again to enter into war against one another.

We have decided that this same system of consultation shall be adopted for dealing with any other question that may interest our two countries, and we are resolved to continue our efforts to remove all possible causes of disagreement and thereby contribute to the maintenance of peace in Europe.

This declaration amounts to a pact of friendship and mutual consultation. Hitler takes his pen and places his signature on it "less," Schmidt believes, "because he expects great results from it than to please the Prime Minister."

Before parting, Hitler and Chamberlain shake both hands for a long time. When the head of the British Government leaves the Führer's residence, he is radiant. He is convinced that he has saved not only peace, but the future of peace.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. In reality, the Munich Agreement had been signed that very morning.

[[PDF page 501]]

XXIV
EUROPE ON THE MORROW OF MUNICH

A few hours later, that is to say on 30 September in the late afternoon, Chamberlain lands at Heston. He steps down from his aircraft holding his umbrella in one hand and brandishing with the other a roll of white paper: these are the Munich Agreements and the Anglo-German declaration. A huge crowd has come to Heathrow airfield to welcome “the flying messenger of peace.” Breaking through the police barriers, it rushes to meet him, singing “For he is a jolly good fellow,” and throwing armfuls of flowers to him.

As soon as he leaves the airplane, an aide-de-camp hands the Prime Minister a letter from King George VI, inviting him to go directly to Buckingham, “for,” the sovereign tells him, “I should like to be the first to express to you my congratulations on the success of your mission to Munich.” But the crowd is so dense that Chamberlain reaches the Royal Palace only after a long delay.

When he returns to 10 Downing Street after his visit to the king, more than twenty thousand people have massed before his residence and in the neighboring streets. The crowd acclaims him with such insistence that he has to show himself at a window and say a few words.

“My friends,” he says in a voice broken by fatigue and emotion, “this is the second time in our history that peace with honor has come from Germany. I am convinced

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. An allusion to Disraeli’s return from the Berlin Conference in 1878. A few days later, when the wave of enthusiasm had somewhat subsided, Chamberlain would ask the House of Commons “not to attach too much weight to words spoken under the sway of emotion after a long and exhausting day, during which he had driven for miles between two walls of demonstrators who had not ceased to acclaim him.”

[[PDF page 502]]

that I bring you peace for our time. Now I advise you to go home and sleep quietly.”

When the crowd has finally dispersed and he returns to his office, a heap of telegrams and letters of congratulation that had arrived during the afternoon, and whose volume continues to increase hour by hour, is handed to him. They come from all the counties of the United Kingdom, from members of the Commonwealth, and even from neutral countries.

Lord Weir, who had accompanied him in 1932 to the Ottawa Conference, writes to him:

“Since 1919, the world has most often been led along harmful and perilous roads. You are the first to

have reversed the current and to have directed it in a beneficial direction... After this week, no man and no nation will be quite the same as before. The possibilities of doing good have become considerable, thanks to the new faith that you have brought to the world."

Marshal Smuts, who will soon be Prime Minister of South Africa, expresses his approval in no less enthusiastic terms:

"A great champion has appeared in the political arena," he declares. "May God bless him! The path followed by the peacemaker has been dangerous and arduous. But he acted without thinking of himself or of his personal future. He risked all for all, and I think he has won all."

The deputy Maxton states for his part:

"Chamberlain did what the great mass of men in the world wanted to be done."

But there are not only letters from prominent personalities. Most of them come from unknown people, from

[[PDF page 503]]

parents whose sons would have gone off to war. All overflow with the same gratitude. To these messages, often written in an awkward hand, are joined flowers, poems, umbrellas, and fishing rods, which pile up in the antechambers of Downing Street. One of these letters says:

"Total war is an abomination. It is an inexpressible relief for us to think that our children will not be massacred, mutilated, blinded, or driven mad, as their fathers or the men of my generation were."

A lady named Kate Bird, who knew the Prime Minister in his childhood, recalls herself to his memory in these lines:

"What you have tried to do has filled me with emotion and pride... To think that it is you who were chosen to speak to the German and tell him what was necessary! May you be blessed in your old age. You will never be forgotten!"

During the following days, the postmen pour into Downing Street whole sacks of testimonies of gratitude from every corner of the world. Everyone wants to thank Chamberlain, whatever his social condition or nationality. "I wish to express to you the warm thanks of a man to whom destiny has entrusted the fate of millions of other men," Leopold III writes to him. This letter from the King of the Belgians is followed by a humble postcard from Rome: "Mr. Chamberlain, may God bless your white head. I am an Italian mother."

In Brussels, a gold medal is struck with the effigy of the "Apostle of Peace." From The Hague, Dutch horticulturists send him their finest tulip bulbs. From Athens, Greeks ask him for a piece of his umbrella, to place it in a reliquary before the icon of their church. Municipalities decide to give his name to streets, "as was done for Gladstone." A former German naval officer writes to him: "I feel like a man condemned to death who has been pardoned at the last minute... My most fervent wish is that Mr. Chamberlain know

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. All Englishmen know that Chamberlain is passionately devoted to trout fishing.

[[PDF page 504]]

that we shall thank and bless him for the rest of our lives."

In France, the joy is no less intense than in England. When Daladier's airplane arrives over Le Bourget, the President of the Council sees through the window of his cabin an immense crowd that has invaded the airfield. He at first thinks that these are demonstrators come to lynch him. To General Gamelin, who welcomes him at the foot of the gangway, he says anxiously:

"It is not brilliant, but I did all I could..."

At the same instant, a roar of joy rises from the multitude. Daladier is acclaimed as he has never been before. Women rush toward him, holding their children out at arm's length for him to kiss them. Delegations come forward with sheaves of flowers tied with tricolor ribbons and bearing the inscription: "To the savior of peace." The journalists besiege him and press him to say a few words. After addressing his thanks to Hitler and Mussolini, he concludes by declaring:

"I think that now peace is effectively saved."

Georges Bonnet, to whom part of the acclamations are addressed, gets into an open car beside him. But from the airport to the Ministry of War, more than five hundred thousand people have gathered spontaneously. Most of the workers and artisans of the Paris suburbs have left their work. Flags float at the windows. The car has to make its way through a real human tide which no police detail thinks of channeling. Since the armistice of 1918, such a spectacle has never been seen.

As for General Gamelin, he is in such a hurry to return to his office to give the demobilization orders that his car bearing the tricolor pennant narrowly misses knocking down the author of this book at the corner of rue de Solférino and boulevard Saint-Germain.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. During the Munich Conference, Daladier shared his apprehensions with Mussolini. "No, you will see," the Duce replied to him, "you will be acclaimed on your return to Paris."

[[PDF page 505]]

At the Council of Ministers held that evening, all the members of the Government gather around the green table at the Élysée. None formulates the slightest criticism; none asks any question after the very complete presentation made by the President of the Council. The following communiqué is drafted at the end of the meeting:

"M. Albert Lebrun, President of the Republic, interpreted the sentiments of the country in thanking M. Daladier for the enlightened and active patriotism with which he has fulfilled the grave and delicate mission that he has just brought to a successful end.

“Unanimously, the Council joined the Head of State in expressing to M. Daladier its congratulations for the decisive effort that he has devoted to the interests of France and of peace.

“M. Daladier thanked them, asking that M. Georges Bonnet be associated with the testimonies addressed to him.”

The next day, in all the Western capitals, enthusiasm reaches delirium. The Times writes: “No conqueror, returning home after a victory won on a battlefield, has come back adorned with more laurels than Mr. Chamberlain on his return from Munich.” Le Matin exults: “Victory! Victory! Victory! Peace is won. It is won against the tortuous, the sold-out, and the mad. It is won for the old and for the young, for mothers and their children!” Paris-Soir likewise does not hide its satisfaction: “Peace! Peace! Peace! That is the word that this morning could be read in every eye and joyfully came from every lip. The world breathes... Our President of the Council and our Minister of Foreign Affairs have preserved peace for us...” Léon Blum writes in Le Populaire: “There is not a man and not a woman in France who will refuse Neville Chamberlain and Édouard Daladier their just tribute of gratitude. War is set aside. The scourge recedes. One can resume work and find sleep again. One can enjoy the beauty of an autumn sun.” La Liberté observes: “In the midst of the general rejoicing, one single angry party: Moscow!” — a formula taken up almost word for word by Je suis partout: “Above all, let no one speak

of humiliation or defeat for France! At Munich there was only one defeated party: Moscow!”

Pierre-Étienne Flandin sends telegrams of congratulation to Chamberlain, Hitler, and Mussolini, praising them for having kept the scourge of war away from Europe by causing a negotiated solution to prevail. A golden book bearing the signatures of more than a million grateful Frenchmen will be presented a few days later to Daladier and Bonnet. Paris-Soir and L’Œuvre open a subscription to offer Chamberlain — The Lord of Peace — “a house of peace on a corner of the soil of France.” In forty-eight hours it gathers more than 100,000 francs.

Moreover, parliamentary approval is beyond doubt. “The hesitant will rally to the policy that has preserved peace,” asserts L’Œuvre. “A majority will translate into parliamentary language the acclamations of Paris along the route of the ministerial car.” In fact, on 5 October the Chamber of Deputies will ratify the Munich Agreements by 535 votes to 75 (including 73 communists) and 3 abstentions. The League of Nations, through the voice of its President, the delegate of Peru, weaves crowns for Neville Chamberlain and proclaims: “The name of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom is blessed today in every home in the world.”

In an address to the Italian prefects, Mussolini emphasizes the role he played in the course of the conference: “At Munich,” he declares, “for the first

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Je suis partout, 7 October 1938. “It has been claimed that, in the event of war, Russia would have abstained, just as a year later,” writes Boris Celovsky. “This assertion goes too far. In 1938, Moscow sincerely desired a war, which it would have waged on the side of the capitalist democracies, and for three reasons: 1) it had nothing to lose and everything to gain from a war unleashed under those conditions; 2) the West would have borne the whole weight of the conflict; 3) it had recognized that Fascism and National Socialism were for it much more dangerous enemies than the Democracies. As

for the saving of Czechoslovakia, that was the least of its concerns."

2. Daladier, for his part, will receive, instead of a telegram, the agenda voted by the steering committee of the Democratic Alliance. Later, only the telegram to Hitler will ever be cited in order to try to discredit the former President of the Council. "This telegram," Flandin would reply, "was not a telegram of congratulations for the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, but a telegram in which I expressed the wish that the agreement of the Great Powers continue, in order to be able to safeguard peace."

3. The two additional votes were those of Henry de Kérillis, national republican deputy for Neuilly, and Jean Bouhey, S.F.I.O. deputy for Côte-d'Or.

[[PDF page 507]]

time since 1861, Italy has played a decisive role in an event of world importance... What happened at Munich is quite simply colossal. I use this word deliberately. What happened at Munich marks the end of Bolshevism in Europe, the end of all political influence of Russia on the continent..."

Even Roosevelt declares himself satisfied: "I have lived through two exhausting weeks," he writes to a friend under the date of 1 October, "but a cruise at sea has allowed me to recover my strength, despite a stupid and prolonged head cold. A few days ago I still wanted to kill Hitler and tear off my nose. Today I feel better disposed toward my nose, and no longer wish to assassinate Hitler."

Only a few isolated persons express reservations or anxiety. But their voices are submerged by the general rejoicing...

Two men, however, do not conceal their dissatisfaction. One of them is Hitler, although he has been wildly acclaimed by the Berlin crowd.

The ink is barely dry at the bottom of the Munich Agreements when he regrets having signed them. He repents of having accepted Mussolini's mediation. Given the ease with which Chamberlain and Daladier accepted his conditions, he is now convinced that even if there had been war, France and England would not have marched. Would Chamberlain have come to Germany three times, and would Roosevelt have sent him the exhortations that we know, if he had not been the strongest? By imposing the Munich Conference on him, the chiefs of the Democracies have caused him to fall into a trap. Certainly, they satisfied all his demands concerning the Sudetens, but they prevented him from making his victorious entry into Prague and deprived him of all the advantages that the disappearance of Czechoslovakia would have brought to the realization of his plans for expansion in the east.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. In particular Emmanuel Mounier (Esprit), Émile Buré (L'Ordre), Gabriel Marcel (Temps présent), etc. Montherlant sees in the general relief "the testimony of a grave weakening of the national energy." As for Maurice Thorez, the chief of the Communist Party, he cries on 7 October, during a meeting at the Vél' d'Hiv: "People are turning away from our France... The Czech Legionaries who fought on French soil are returning their decorations. Scientists [Joliot-Curie and Professor Langevin] and artists [Picasso and Chagall] are resigning from our national institutions. What shame! What humiliation!" Thorez omits to say that the personalities in question belong to the Communist Party and are resigning in obedience to the Party's instructions.

[[PDF page 508]]

One may object that he would have run up against the Russians. Who can assert it? Given the abstention of France and England, it is very likely that the Russians would not have marched either. And even if they had done so, Hitler is convinced that he would quickly have overcome them, for the Red Army will not be in a condition to sustain a war for two or three years. After crushing Prague, he would have rushed on the Kremlin, and all the problems facing Germany would have been settled at one stroke. By allowing himself to become bogged down in negotiation, he gave the Czechs time to mobilize and thereby lost the advantage of surprise.

Moreover, by satisfying all his demands, the British put him in the impossibility of resorting to arms. From that moment, the Germans themselves would not have understood it. The silent parade of 27 September clearly signified this to him. The world believes that he has triumphed all along the line, and his generals imagine that everything succeeds for him? What an error! For his part, he has the impression of having been played. No doubt he has attained, without firing a shot, all the objectives that he had openly proclaimed. But not his secret aims, which were the essential thing. Now everything must begin again...

But who can assert that matters will present themselves a second time under so favorable an aspect? Will the Democracies not pull themselves together and rearm? All these questions crowd into his head, and that is why he was distracted and in a bad mood when Chamberlain came back to see him to ask him to sign the Anglo-German declaration. That is also why he will say to Martin Bormann on 14 February 1945:

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. Declaration by General Schmundt to the author in 1942. François-Poncet writes, for his part: “All the observations that I was able to gather show... that if one had broken with Hitler and cut short all discussion, his pride would have reared up, he would have picked up the gauntlet and thrown himself into the adventure against all and sundry.”

3. François-Poncet believes that “Hitler was profoundly disappointed. He considered that at Munich he had compromised and capitulated.”

[[PDF page 509]]

“From the military point of view, our interest was for the war to begin a year earlier. I ought to have taken the initiative in 1938 instead of letting it be imposed on me in 1939, since in any case it was ineluctable. But I can do nothing if the English and the French accepted all my demands at Munich...”

The other man to take a position against the Munich Agreements is Winston Churchill, for he remains convinced that Russia would have marched if France and England had given the example, and that it would have been possible to force the hand of Romania and Hungary in order to oblige them to let Soviet troops pass.

“I have to say to you today unpleasant and unpopular things, things that everyone refuses to see or seeks to forget,” he declares on 5 October in the House of Commons. “I do not wish to speak only of

Czechoslovakia... It must now be regarded as certain that all the countries of central and eastern Europe are going to try to obtain from triumphant National Socialist power the best conditions they can get. The system of alliances with the countries of central Europe on which France counted until now to guarantee her security has been swept away, and I see no way to reconstruct it. The road that descends the Danube valley to the Black Sea, the road that leads to Turkey, has just been opened. In fact, I believe that all these countries in the middle of Europe will be drawn, one after another, into the orbit of a vast political system of force, a policy not only of military power, but of economic power radiating from Berlin... Let us not try to blind ourselves on this point: France and Great Britain have just suffered a disaster of the first magnitude."

[[PDF page 510]]

XXV
THE WEHRMACHT OCCUPIES THE SUDETEN LANDS
(1–21 October 1938)

On 1 October 1938, at the beginning of the morning, Hitler signs a decree ordering General von Brauchitsch to occupy the territories that are to be ceded by Czechoslovakia. Then he appoints Konrad Henlein Reich Commissioner for the Sudeten lands and specifies that he will enter into office as soon as the purely military phase of the occupation is completed.

The same day, at 2 p.m., an O.K.W. communiqué announces that the first units of the Wehrmacht have crossed the frontiers of Czechoslovakia between Helfenberg and Finsterau. Descending from the ridges of the Böhmerwald, they advance toward the interior plain of Bohemia and draw closer to their first objective: the upper course of the Moldau.

From noon onward, the populations have rushed to meet their liberators. They have torn up the frontier posts painted in the

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. On 28 March 1938, during their first interview at the Berlin Chancellery, Hitler said to Henlein: "I am at your side. Tomorrow, you will be my Statthalter." Hitler keeps his promise. Henlein does likewise. The next day, 2 October, he issues to his compatriots a proclamation ending with these words: "Once again, we shall prove to the world that all Sudetens stand as one man behind Adolf Hitler, the Führer of all Germans."

2. Dokumente und Berichte zur deutschen Zeitgeschichte, nos. 15–20, 20 October 1938, p. 232.

3. They are going to take possession of zone I, whose occupation was fixed for 1 and 2 October.

4. They travel in reverse the route followed by the Czechoslovak formations in November 1918 when they left Prague to occupy the peripheral regions of the country. Eternal ebbs and flows of history...

[[PDF page 511]]

Czechoslovak colors and stretched banners across the roads on which one reads: "Welcome to our comrades of the German Army!" or else: "Blood returns to blood, despite misery and death!"

But as if they were insensitive to the ovations directed at them, the German infantrymen march past with weapons in hand and grave faces. They do not leave the ranks to seize the bouquets held out to them by groups of young girls, for they have received orders to remain on the alert. At the first sign of resistance shown by the Czechs, Hitler has enjoined the O.K.W. to open fire and to pass from peaceful occupation to the execution of Plan Green. Yet this day — like the following ones — will unfold without incident.

On 3 October, Hitler in turn crosses the German-Czech frontier at Wildenau, in the company of the advance guards of General von Bock. He first stops at Eger, the city of Wallenstein, where he delivers the following address:

“Never again will this territory be torn from us! The nation was ready to draw the sword to protect you. Now you have become an integral part of the Reich and you will not hesitate to draw the sword to protect it in your turn.”

On 4 October, he is at Karlsbad, where he declares:

“An unshakable decision has brought me among you. But behind this decision stood the will to resort to arms to liberate you if that was necessary... I did not know by what means I would come here. But I was certain of one thing: that I would come here one day...”

The other zones are occupied, the next day and the day after, by the armies of Generals von Rundstedt and von Reichenau. During their advance, special units of the Wehrmacht blow up the casemates, strategic bridges, and all the military works they encounter on their

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. That is, to armed intervention.

2. They will occupy zone III, by far the most important of the four. Let us recall that General von Bock commanded the troops that made their entry into Austria.

route. In eight days, the entire fortified system of Czechoslovakia is dismantled.

On 9 October, by order of the Führer, Konrad Henlein instructs his delegate, Karl Hermann Frank, to proceed with the dissolution of the Sudeten Free Corps and to distribute its personnel among the Party organizations.

“The task of the Free Corps is completed,” Henlein says to his men massed for the last time on the great square of Reichenberg. “Yet the struggle continues. Your watchword remains: forever with Hitler, for Greater Germany!”

The next day, the former chief of the S.d.P. explains to his compatriots how the incorporation of the Sudeten lands into the Reich will take place: South Moravia will be attached to the Ostmark (Austria), and the southern part of German Bohemia to Bavaria. As for the rest of the territory, it will form a single administrative entity bearing the name Sudetengau.

On 20 October, the new frontiers between the Reich and Czechoslovakia having been fixed by the International Commission, Hitler addresses the following letter to General von Brauchitsch:

“The occupation of the Sudeten Territories, carried out by portions of the Army, the Luftwaffe, the Police, the S.S., and the S.A. is completed.

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. During an inspection tour in the fortified zone, Hitler and his generals will observe with fright the power of the Czech fortifications. “Have you looked closely at the Czech fortresses?” asks Sepp Dietrich, the commander of the Leibstandarte, of Captain Wiedemann. “If we had had to take them by force, it would have cost us dearly!”

3. The International Commission, constituted by virtue of paragraph 3 of the Munich Agreements, is composed of a delegate from Germany (M. von Weizsäcker), Great Britain (Sir Horace Wilson), France (M. François-Poncet), Italy (M. Attolico), and Czechoslovakia (M. Mastny). It held two sessions during the day of 1 October. On the 5th, it fixed the territories to be occupied by German troops. On the 13th, it delimited — except for corrections of detail — the new frontiers between the Reich and Czechoslovakia, basing itself on the linguistic frontier as it stood on 1 January 1910. The thesis according to which 800,000 Czechs were included within the frontiers of the Reich is erroneous. It rests on the figure advanced by M. Mastny on the afternoon of 29 September, when the new frontiers had not yet been defined. In reality, there were hardly more than 350,000 Czechs on the German side. Since these were very dispersed, the International Commission did not consider it useful to proceed to plebiscites. The decision was taken unanimously on 13 October.

“Three and a half million Germans placed under the protection of the Wehrmacht have definitively returned to the Reich.

“Their administration will pass into the hands of the civil authorities on 21 October 1938. Consequently, I relieve you, as of that day, of the task of exercising executive power.

“The entire German people joins our Sudeten compatriots in thanking all those who have taken part in their liberation.

“Adolf Hitler.”

In response to this message, General von Brauchitsch addresses the following order of the day to the Army:

“The mission entrusted to the Army by the Supreme Chief of the Wehrmacht ends today.

“I thank the Army for the zeal, discipline, and sense of duty it has shown during these last months.

“Let us all work for the Führer and for the Fatherland!

“The Commander-in-Chief of the Army,”

“von Brauchitsch.”

The next day, 21 October, a law officializes the reincorporation of the Sudetens into the Reich. On 4 December, “supplementary elections” for the Reichstag take place. In fact, they amount to a referendum. 98.90 percent of the votes approve attachment to the Reich. As a result, 41 representatives of the former German districts of Czechoslovakia will go to sit in the Berlin Parliament.

The Sudeten affair is settled. And yet, for Bohemia, the most dramatic hours are still to come...

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
2. Count of the votes:
Registered voters: 2,532,863
Number of voters: 2,497,604
Number of “yes” votes: 2,464,681
Number of “no” votes: 27,427
Invalid ballots: 5,496
The members of the Czech minority included within the new German frontiers were not admitted to vote. They were placed before the choice: return to Czech territory or sign a “declaration of loyalism.”

[[PDF page 515]]

TABLE OF MAPS

I. — Journey of the Czech Legions across Siberia 56–57
II. — Separation of the Slavic and German districts of Bohemia, according to the imperial ordinance of 21 May 1918 108
III. — The Czechoslovak Republic (1919–1938) 167
IV. — The fortified zone of Germany’s western frontiers 247
V. — The plan for the invasion of Czechoslovakia 365
VI. — Map annexed to the German memorandum of Godesberg (23 September 1938) 433
VII. — Territories occupied by the German troops (annex to the Munich Agreement, 29 September 1938) 489
VIII. — New German-Czech frontiers as of 21 October 1938 509

GRAPH

[Retained narrative/explanatory footnotes from this page]
1. — Distribution of the tendencies of the German parties within the Prague Parliament 187

[[PDF page 517]]

TABLE OF CONTENTS
OF THE FIFTH VOLUME

[[PDF page 519]]

PART ONE
THE FOUNDATION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

I. — Bohemia before 1914 11
The jewel of Europe (11). — A line of demarcation between Germans and Slavs (11). — The Hussite wars (12). — Prague, high place of culture (12). — The Battle of the White Mountain (1620) (12). — The cradle of notable personalities (13). — The Habsburgs (1516) (13). — The Letters of Majesty (13). — Joseph II's Civil Code (14). — 1812 and 1848 (14). — The revolution of 1848 (15). — The Wenzelsbad Congress (11 March 1848) (15). — Letter from Palacký to President Soiron (17). — The Frankfurt Parliament (May 1848) (18). — First Congress of the Slavic peoples (2 June 1848) (19). — Reaction triumphs (19). — The Stadion Constitution (20). — The "Organic Statute" of 31 December 1851 (20). — Protest by Rieger (21). — Belcredi makes concessions (21). — The Austro-Prussian War (1866) (22). — "May Prussia annex us!" (22). — The Monarchy becomes dualist (23). — Privileges granted to the Hungarians (23). — The imperial rescript of 12 September 1871 (24). — Outcry in Budapest and Berlin (25). — Times are changing (25). — Mozart, Stein, and Beethoven (26). — The Germans of Bohemia and the Franco-German War of 1870 (26). — The Slavs of Bohemia and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 (26). — The reforms of Count Taaffe (1879) (27). — Ritter von Schönerer and the elections of 1901 (28). — Founding of the German Workers' Party (1909) (28). — Awakening of Czech nationalism (29). — The Czechs turn toward Saint Petersburg (29). — Dr. Kramář convenes the second Congress of Slavic peoples (30). — The Sokols (30). — First Congress of the Sokols (20 July 1912) (31). — Bohemia under trusteeship (32). — Increased powers of the Statthalter (32). — Revolt of the "Young Czechs" (32). — The Sarajevo assassination (28 June 1914) (33). — Austria's ultimatum to Serbia (23 July 1914) (34). — Russia mobilizes (34). — Europe aflame (4 August 1914) (34).

II. — The Odyssey of the Czech Legionaries across Siberia (1914–1919) 36
Anxiety of the Czech nationalists (36). — Manifesto of Grand Duke Nicholas (3 August 1914) (36). — Kramář's point of view (37). — Masaryk's point of view (37). — Creation of the Maffia (38). — Clandestine activity of Beneš (38). — Departure of Masaryk abroad (38). — The internal resistance is decapitated (39). — Beneš goes into exile (1 September 1915) (39). — Founding of the National Committee of Paris (39). — Dürich and Štefánik (39). — Mixed reception by the French (40). — The independence movement begins in Russia (40). — Czech soldiers desert the Austrian Army (40). — Creation of the Družina (20 August 1914) (41). — 25,000 Czechs crowd the Russian camps (41). — Sazonov favorable to the creation of an army of Czech volunteers (41). — Hesitations of the Russian General Staff (42). — The Tsar gives his assent (21 April 1916) (42). — Stürmer's "Slavic" policy (43). — Creation of a Czech National Council in Russia (43). — Consternation of Beneš and Masaryk (43). — Mission of Štefánik and Dürich to Petrograd (August 1916) (44). — Dürich's volte-face (44). — Note from General Gurko to Štefánik (17 January 1917) (45). — The Russian Revolution of February 1917 (45). — The Tsar is interned at Tsarskoye Selo (45). — The Miliukov Government (46). — General Dukhonin transforms the Czech brigade into a division (46). — Kerensky and Kornilov (47). — The Battle of Zborov (18 June 1917) (47). — The battle ends in disaster (48). — The Czech forces fall back on Kiev (48). — The Czech Army Corps reaches 42,000 men (48). — Kornilov's coup de force (49). — The October Revolution of 1917 (49). — Lenin and Trotsky in power (49). — Disarray of the Czechs (49). — Agreement with Muraviev (49). — The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (3 March 1918) (50). — Advance of the Germans (50). — The Czechs fall back toward the Urals (50). — Trotsky demands their disarmament (51). — Masaryk's journey to Russia (51). — Masaryk's ordinance (52). — The Czech fighters turn into Legionaries (52). — Masaryk orders them to remain neutral (52). — Russian cadres are eliminated (53). — The Czechs fall back toward the Trans-Siberian Railway

(53). — They arrive in the Urals (54). — Reversal by the Allies (54). — Appeal to “Russian Patriots” (54). — Entry of the White Russians into Kazan (55). — The treasure of the Tsars (55). — The Socialist-Revolutionary Committee of Samara (55). — The Whites regroup in Siberia (58). — The Ural front disintegrates (58). — Distress of the Czechs (58). — “Our objective is the railway” (58). — The Czechs escape the control of their officers (58). — The pillaging begins (59). — Scenes of indiscipline (59). — Suicide of Colonel Švec (59). — The armistice is signed on the Western Front (11 November 1918) (59). — The Czechs accelerate their retreat (59). — They seize twenty thousand wagons (60). — Disturbances in railway traffic (60). — Admiral Kolchak’s coup d’état (19 November 1918) (60). — Kolchak “Supreme Regent of all the Russias” (60). — Kolchak-Syrový interview (61). — “No Czech will take part in the anti-Bolshevik crusade” (61). — Journey of General Janin and General Štefánik to Omsk (62). — Štefánik’s efforts to restore discipline (62). — Death of Štefánik (63). — Kolchak’s situation is compromised (63). — Appearance of Radola Gajda (63). — The past of Rudolf Geidl (64). — General Sakharov’s opinion of Gajda (64). — Gajda’s program (65). — Gajda-Syrový rivalry (65). — Kolchak-Gajda interview (65). — Kolchak appoints Gajda commander-in-chief of the Army of Siberia (66). — The review at Ekaterinburg (66). — The “Immortal Battalion” of General Gajda (67). — Altercation between Gajda and Kolchak (68). — Battle of the Urals (68). — General rout (69). — Gajda flees to Vladivostok (69). — Kolchak transfers his headquarters from Omsk to Tomsk (69). — Tukhachevsky’s offensive (70). — Collapse of the Ural front (70). — No more Russian-Czech military collaboration (70). — Kolchak is in a desperate situation (71). — The Siberian winter (71). — Offensive of the 5th Red Army (71). — Tukhachevsky drives into central Siberia (72). — Exodus of the populations (72). — The Communists take power in Irkutsk (72). — The White Army is surrounded (72). — Kolchak gives the order to stop the Czech trains (73). — The conflict is open between Kolchak and the Czechs (73). — Monster bottleneck at Taiga (74). — Kolchak separates himself from his army (74). — Retreat of the Whites toward the east (75). — The Czechs in contact with the Bolsheviks (75). — Ultimatum of the Reds (11 January 1920) (75). — The ransom for passage (75). — The Czechs immobilize Kolchak’s convoy (76). — Janin advises Kolchak to place himself under Czech protection (76). — Kolchak’s train arrives at Irkutsk (77). — Kolchak delivered to the Reds by Syrový (77). — Kolchak’s despair (77). — Russo-Czech agreement of Kuitun (78). — The pillaging of the Tsars’ treasure (78). — General Skipetrov rushes toward Irkutsk (79). — The Czechs stop him (79). — General Sakharov arrives at Innokentievsk (79). — Kolchak and his entourage are shot (7 February 1920) (80). — Apocalyptic scenes along the Trans-Siberian (80). — The White Army flees across Lake Baikal (80). — The 2nd Czech Division leaves Irkutsk (81). — The Czech Legionaries arrive in Manchuria (81). — Influx of gold at Harbin (82). — Embarkation at Vladivostok (82). — The Czech Armada (82). — The return of the Legionaries to Europe (82). — The Anabasis of the Legionaries is finished (83). — Enthusiasm in Prague (83). — Declarations by Klofáč (83). — Declaration by Beneš (84).

[[PDF page 521]]

III. — The work of the Czech National Council of Paris 85
Intense activity of Masaryk, Beneš, and Štefánik (85). — Struggle against the Allies’ prejudices (86). — A Czech company is created in the Foreign Legion (86). — Czechs residing in France receive the status of allies (86). — England follows the movement (87). — Coordination of Czech colonies abroad (87). — The Czech brigade in Russia recognizes Masaryk as dictator (88). — Masaryk multiplies contacts in Paris, London, and Washington (89). — Masaryk and the Jews (89). — The struggle against Austrophilia (90). — Masaryk’s “Austrian Manifesto” (90). — “Austria must be destroyed” (91). — Emperor Charles’s attempts at a separate peace (91). — Masaryk-Briand interview (3 February 1916) (92). — Štefánik negotiates with the rue Saint-Dominique (92). — Telegram from George V to

Masaryk (93). — France's and England's reply to President Wilson (93). — Beneš's démarches with Berthelot (93). — Beneš, Štefánik, and Osuský create the word "Czechoslovakia" (94). — The United States enters the war (6 April 1917) (94). — Congress of the "Oppressed Peoples" at Rome (April 1917) (94). — The Italian Government authorizes the creation of a Czech Legion in Italy (95). — Declaration by M. Orlando (95). — The English Government recognizes the National Council (95). — Declaration by M. Pichon (29 June 1918) (96). — Declaration by M. Balfour (96). — Masaryk negotiates with the Slovaks (97). — The Treaty of Pittsburgh (97). — Masaryk negotiates with the Ruthenians (98). — The Homestead agreement (27 July 1918) (98). — New declaration by M. Balfour (9 August 1918) (99). — Wilson-Lansing declaration (2 September 1918) (100). — The French Government recognizes de jure the Czechoslovak Government (15 October 1918) (100). — Serbia, Poland, Italy, Greece, Belgium, Portugal, Brazil, and Japan do likewise (100). — Abdication of William II (9 November 1918) (100). — The First World War is over (100). — Masaryk returns to France (7 December 1918) (101). — Beneš and Masaryk received as triumphators in Paris (101). — The National Assembly in Prague proclaims Masaryk head of the Czechoslovak State (14 November 1918) (101). — Masaryk's departure for Prague (17 December 1918) (101). — He arrives in Bohemia (20 December 1918) (102).

IV. — From internal resistance to the proclamation of the Republic 103
Internal situation of Bohemia (103). — The population remains loyal to the Habsburgs (103). — Emperor Charles frees Kramář, Klofáč, Scheiner, and Rašín (105). — The National Committee reconstitutes itself (105). — The resistance organizes itself (105). — The declaration of the "Three Kings" (6 January 1918) (106). — Declaration by President Wilson before the American Congress (8 February 1918) (106). — Ordinance of Emperor Charles (21 May 1918) (107). — Czechs and Germans seem satisfied (108). — Rivalry between the Paris Committee and the Prague Committee (108). — The Paris Committee tries to increase tension in Bohemia (108). — The Allies recognize the Paris Committee (109). — The Czech revolution of 14 October 1918 (109). — Pièek's conspiracy is crushed in the egg (109). — The Reichsrat deputies are invited to constitute themselves into "National Committees" (110). — Wilson's Fourteen Points (110). — Masaryk's intervention with Wilson (111). — Wilson's reply to Count Andrassy (18 October 1918) (112). — Masaryk proclaims the independence of Czechoslovakia (112). — The imperial Cabinet is consternated (113). — Emperor Charles prepares the liquidation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (113). — Lammasch-Kramář agreement (24 October 1918) (113). — The National Committee of Prague decides to act (113). — The National Council assumes power (28 October 1918) (114). — The first law of the new Czechoslovak state (114). — The replacement of Austrian officials by Czech officials (115). — Reaction of the German deputies of Bohemia (115). — Deutschböhmen, Sudetenland, and Südmähren (115). — The statues of Joseph II and Radetzky are unbolted (116). — Kramář-Beneš rivalry (116). — The Geneva interview (116). — Kramář's position (117). — Beneš's position (117). — Kramář-Beneš agreement (117). — Kramář returns to Prague (118). — Troubles break out (118). — Czech railwaymen go on strike (119). — Coudenhove-Rašín interview (119). — Rašín arrests Coudenhove (119). — The evacuation of Austrian garrisons begins (120). — Austria lays down arms (4 November 1918) (120). — Dr. Renner becomes chancellor of the Austrian federal state (120). — The Czech National Assembly, convened by Kramář, holds its first session (14 November 1918) (120). — Thomas Masaryk is proclaimed president of the Czechoslovak Republic (120). — Kramář becomes President of the Council and Beneš Foreign Minister (120). — The Slovak Assembly of Saint-Martin of Turiec (30 October 1918) (121). — Congress of Prešov and Košice (121). — Fighting continues in Ruthenia (121). — The Congress of Scranton, Pennsylvania (19 November 1918) (121). — Arrival of Masaryk in Prague (21 December 1918) (122). — The crowd gives him a delirious welcome (122). — The resurrection of a state (123). — Masaryk takes the oath to the Constitution (123).

V. — The occupation of the territory and the elections of 1919 124
The “historic limits” of Czechoslovakia (124). — These words are empty of meaning (124). — Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, Hungarians, Ruthenians, and Poles (124). — A mosaic of races, languages, and religions (124). — Austria wants to incorporate itself into the Reich (125). — The Allies oppose this (125). — The Sudeten problem (125). — What will the attitude of the United States be? (126). — German industrial regions and Slavic agricultural regions (126). — Prague wants to confront the Peace Conference with a fait accompli (126). — Occupation of the German districts (126). — Central position of the Czechs, peripheral position of the Germans (126). — Aussig’s appeal for help against the Spartacists (127). — The Czechs attack toward Teplitz (27 November 1918) (127). — The Czechs occupy all the German districts (127). — Occupation of Austrian Silesia and Moravia (128). — Violent engagements with Hungarian troops (129). — The Czechs arrive in Ruthenia (129). — A Ukrainian delegation arrives in Paris (129). — The Germans engage in passive resistance (130). — The elections for the Austrian National Assembly (130). — Activity of the German National Socialist Workers’ Party (D.N.S.A.P.) (130). — The Czechs bring Article 65 of the old Austrian Constitution back into force (131). — The demonstrations of 4 March 1919 (131). — The shootings of Kaaden (132). — The Germans rely on the Peace Conference (132). — The Czechs prescribe municipal elections (15 June 1919) (133). — The parties of the right wish to abstain (133). — The parties of the left decide to vote (133). — The attitude of the parties of the left obliges the Germans to vote (133). — Result of the elections (133). — A victory for Prague (134).

VI. — The last battle: the Treaty of Saint-Germain 135
The Peace Congress opens in Paris (19 January 1919) (135). — Proposal of the Swiss Government (135). — Clemenceau’s declaration on the “historic frontiers” (136). — The “Council of Five” (136). — The “special commissions” (137). — Beneš’s Memorandum No. III (138). — The victors ignore the problems of central Europe (143). — The Polish memorandum on Teschen (144). — Arrival of the Austrian delegation (144). — The peace terms are handed to the Austrians (2 June 1919) (145). — Chancellor Renner leaves for Austria again (145). — The Feldkirch Conference (3–6 June 1919) (145). — Anarchic situation in central Europe (146). — Fighting between Hungarians and Romanians (146). — Fighting between Serbs and Austrians in Carinthia (146). — Hungarian offensive toward the Carpathians (4 June 1919) (147). — Clemenceau’s first ultimatum to the Hungarians (7 June 1919) (147). — The Hungarians evacuate Slovakia (147). — Chancellor Renner’s prophetic warning to Clemenceau (15 June 1919) (148). — Address of the delegates of the Germans of Bohemia to the Supreme Council (149). — The demand for a plebiscite is rejected (151). — Signing of the Treaty of Versailles (28 June 1919) (151). — Note by Chancellor Renner proposing a federal Constitution for Czechoslovakia (10 July 1919) (152). — This proposal is rejected (152). — New warning from Chancellor Renner to Clemenceau (6 August 1919) (153). — The Austrian Federal Assembly takes cognizance of the clauses of the Treaty of Saint-Germain (153). — General consternation of the deputies (154). — Declaration by the chiefs of the different “lands” constituting federal Austria (5 September 1919) (155). — Signing of the Treaty of Saint-Germain (10 September 1919) (156). — Chancellor Renner’s final protest (156). — The Treaty of Saint-Germain on minorities (157). — Berthelot’s declaration (158). — Ratification of the Treaty of Saint-Germain by the Austrian Parliament (17 October 1919) (158). — The Treaty enters into force (4 June 1920) (158). — Poland in danger (159). — Piłsudski issues an appeal for help to the Allies (160). — Conditions of the Allies (160). — Piłsudski’s grief (161). — Settlement of the Teschen affair (161). — Protest by Paderewski (28 July 1920) (161). — The frontiers of Czechoslovakia are fixed (162).

PART TWO
THE ATTACHMENT OF THE SUDETENS TO THE REICH

VII. — The “de-Germanization” of the German districts 165
Birth of the Czechoslovak Republic (165). — The hatred of neighboring countries (166). — Masaryk and Beneš opt for the strong way (166). — The Constitution of the state (169). — The promises of federalism are thrown into the wastebasket (169). — The policy of “de-Germanization” (170). — Discriminatory measures against veterans (170). — Against subscribers to war loans (171). — Against the banks (171). — Agrarian reform (172). — The former Legionaries settle as colonists in the German districts (172). — The school system (173). — Nationalization of forests (173). — The economic crisis (174). — Unemployment and suicides (174). — Revolt or perish (175).

VIII. — The Sudeten reaction 176
M. Lodgman von Auen begins the struggle (176). — His political testament (176). — Electoral combinations flourish (177). — Systematic opposition (178). — The realists (178). — The two peoples do not reconcile (179). — Hans Krebs and the D.N.S.A.P. (179). — Dissolution of the D.N.S.A.P. (179). — Krebs and Viererbl take refuge in Germany (179). — Proclamation by Konrad Henlein (1 October 1933) (180). — Biography of Henlein (181). — The Sudeten gymnastic associations (182). — Henlein is not National Socialist (183). — Rallying of the D.N.S.A.P. to the Sudeten Homeland Front (183). — Henlein’s first journey to London (184). — Henlein meets Hitler at the 1936 Olympic Games (185). — Other journeys by Henlein to London (185). — The elections of 19 May 1935 (185). — The Sudeten Party wins 66.7 percent of the German votes (186). — Beneš continues his policy of assimilation (188). — M. Hodža becomes alarmed (188). — Henlein-Hodža negotiations (188). — Henlein losing momentum (189). — The Teplitz incident (189). — K. H. Frank is arrested (189). — Henlein’s ultimatum to Beneš (190). — Goebbels publishes it in Germany (190). — Henlein’s secret report to Hitler (19 November 1937) (190). — The decisive turning point in German-Sudeten relations (196). — Letters from Beneš and Hodža to the Sudeten leaders (196). — Beran preaches conciliation (197). — Hitler’s speech to the Reichstag (20 February 1938) (197). — Panic in Prague (198). — Hodža’s reply (198). — Beneš’s declaration (198). — Hitler marches on Vienna (199).

[[PDF page 526]]

IX. — The Europe of Versailles disintegrates 200
France seeks allies on the continent (200). — The tribune of the League of Nations (201). — Geneva guarantor of the status quo (201). — Franco-Polish treaty of 1921 (201). — Disputes in central Europe (201). — Franco-Czechoslovak treaty (25 January 1924) (202). — New Franco-Czechoslovak treaty (16 October 1925) (202). — Franco-Romanian treaty (203). — Revisionism gains ground (204). — Rearmament of the Reich (204). — The French Council of Ministers of 6 April 1934 (205). — Declaration by Barthou (205). — Declaration by Herriot (205). — France opposes Germany’s rearmament (206). — Barthou makes the round of the capitals (207). — Barthou’s policy in an impasse (209). — Assassination of Barthou (9 October 1934) (209). — Laval succeeds him (209). — Laval-Potemkin negotiations (210). — The Franco-Soviet Pact (2 May 1935) (211). — Laval received in Moscow (212). — Laval in Warsaw (213). — Colonel Beck’s refusal to defend Czechoslovakia (213). — Hitler occupies the Rhineland (213). — Poland signs a non-aggression pact with Germany (26 January 1934) (214). — Belgium proclaims its neutrality (14 October 1936) (214). — General Gamelin’s journey to Warsaw (215). — Rydz-Śmigły’s journey to Paris (215). — Yvon Delbos again makes the round of the capitals (December 1937) (216). — Polish reservations (217). — Romanian reservations (217). — Mussolini’s warnings to Stoyadinović (217). — Delbos well received in Prague

(218). — He reveals to Beneš the extent of his disappointment (218). — Europe cut in three (219). — France is isolated (219).

X. — Hitler decides to finish with Czechoslovakia 220
Consequences of the Anschluss (221). — The Sudetens await their liberation (221). — Speech by Konrad Henlein (222). — Hitler's first directives to General Keitel (21 April 1938) (222). — Modifications made to Plan Green (225). — The Czech mobilization of 21 May 1938 (227). — Hitler's anger (228). — Hitler decides to crush Czechoslovakia (30 May 1938) (229). — New directives to the Wehrmacht (229). — Hitler will attack on 1 October 1938 (231).

XI. — The dislocation of Czechoslovakia grows worse 232
The Sudetens enter into ferment (232). — Eisenlohr dictates his conditions to Henlein and Frank (233). — New success of the S.d.P. (234). — Henlein-Hitler interview (28 March 1938) (235). — Henlein-Ribbentrop conference (236). — The Karlsbad Congress (23–24 April 1938) (236). — The eight points of Karlsbad (237). — Crisis within the Czech Cabinet (238). — Resignation of the German ministers (238). — Jan Masaryk-Sir Samuel Hoare interview (239). — Second Hitler-Henlein meeting (240). — New journey by Henlein to London (240). — The British are favorable to the Sudetens (240). — The Czech municipal elections (May–June 1938) (241). — The S.d.P. wins 90 percent of the German votes (241). — Henlein is plebiscited (241). — Prague resumes negotiation (242). — Henlein makes contact with the Slovak autonomists (242). — The twentieth anniversary of the Treaty of Pittsburgh (30 May 1938) (243). — The visit of Dr. Hl'etko (244). — Czechoslovakia an "artificial state" (244).

XII. — Hitler gives the order to build the Siegfried Line 245
Hitler fixes his intervention for 1 October 1938 (245). — He decides to build fortifications in the west (246). — 17,000 concrete works (246). — Bodenschatz-Stehlin conversation (248). — Hitler hands Keitel "General Strategic Directives" (7 July 1938) (250). — Comparative state of the French and German air forces (250). — Hitler's directives are transmitted to the General Staff (254). — Anxiety of the German High Command (255).

XIII. — General Beck seeks to provoke the resignation of the Army commanders 256
Position of the Prussian Army with regard to the state (256). — 1811, 1848, 1866, 1870, 1905, 1914 (257). — Moltke and Seeckt (259). — The generals would like to recover their independence (260). — General Beck's career (261). — His character (263). — The memorandum of 5 May 1938 (267). — The fear of a second world war (270). — Hitler's exasperation (271). — Balance of forces in Europe (272). — Beck decides to resort to strong measures (275). — The note of 16 July 1938 (275). — "Let the generals hand in their collective resignation!" (276). — Hesitations of General Brauchitsch (278). — The military and political opposition (280). — Gördeler's journey to London (April 1938) (281). — Beck returns to the attack (282). — Project for a coup de force (283). — Beck becomes more pressing (29 July 1938) (284). — The Berlin military conference (4 August 1938) (285). — Beck's declaration (286). — Reservations of General Busch (287). — "What do you do with the oath?" (287). — Brauchitsch evades (288). — The great maneuvers at Jüterbog (289). — Beck's resignation (18 August) (290). — Beck takes leave of his collaborators (290).

XIV. — The diplomatic impasse: I. France acknowledges its impotence 292
The Permanent Council of National Defense meets at Matignon (15 March 1938) (292). — Minutes of the conference (293). — Pessimism of General Vuillemin (295). — Pessimism of General Gamelin

(297). — A single attack sector: the Saar (301). — Notes by Generals Georges and Billotte (302). — Suggestions by Gamelin to Syrový (303). — France dependent on London, Washington, and Moscow (304).

XV. — The diplomatic impasse: II. England refuses to commit herself on the continent 305
Chamberlain's opinion (305). — England's attitude toward Czechoslovakia (306). — Chamberlain's policy (308). — England refuses to undertake new commitments in Europe (309). — First journey by Daladier and Bonnet to London (28–29 April 1938) (310). — London advocates an amicable arrangement between Berlin and Prague (312). — The British note of 22 May 1938 (313). — Bonnet informs Osuský of the situation (314). — Poland's refusal to help Czechoslovakia (314). — Warsaw has not forgotten the stab in the back at Teschen (314). — Opinion of Marshal Rydz-Śmigły (315). — The Hodža-Beneš negotiations mark time (315). — Lord Halifax asks Bonnet to exert pressure on Prague (317). — Bonnet refuses (317). — He counsels moderation to Osuský (317). — Bad relations between Osuský and Beneš (318). — Obstinacy of Beneš (318). — Beneš-Bertrand de Jouvenel interview (318). — Propaganda of the German émigrés (319). — Beneš and the Freemasons (319). — Beneš does not follow up Osuský's démarche (320). — Journey of the British sovereigns to France (321). — The dispositions of the Foreign Office remain unchanged (321). — Visit of General Vuillemin to Berlin (321). — He is frightened by the power of the Luftwaffe (323). — Bonnet questions England on the nature of its aid (324). — Evasive British reply (12 September 1938) (325). — Bonnet insists (326). — England offers two non-motorized divisions and one hundred fifty airplanes (326). — Churchill's opinion (326).

[[PDF page 529]]

XVI. — The diplomatic impasse: III. The United States and the U.S.S.R. save themselves from the game 327
Roosevelt's bellicose attitude (327). — Efforts of Bullitt and Saint-Quentin to calm him (328). — Chamberlain distrusts Roosevelt (329). — "Nothing should be expected from the Americans except words" (329). — Roosevelt thinks of an international conference (329). — Chamberlain snubs him (329). — Roosevelt's anger (330). — Eden's resignation (330). — American isolationism (331). — Congress votes four "neutrality laws" (331). — America chained (333). — Bullitt's speech at Pointe de Grave (333). — The American press is stirred (334). — Roosevelt disavows his ambassador (334). — Bullitt warns Bonnet that in the event of war America will be able to do nothing for France (335). — A speech by Paul Reynaud (26–28 February 1938) (335). — Belgium's attitude (336). — Moscow defends the right of peoples to dispose of themselves (1924) (336). — The Soviet Union changes tack (337). — It becomes champion of the status quo (1936) (337). — Declaration by Litvinov (15–17 March 1938) (338). — The U.S.S.R. subordinates its intervention to France's (339). — Litvinov's proposals to London and Paris (339). — Chamberlain rejects them (340). — Russian mistrust increases (340). — The rejection of Russian offers worries Beneš (341). — Interview between King Carol of Romania and Arnošt Heidrich (341). — The U.S.S.R. requires the agreement of Poland and Romania (342). — Polish refusal (342). — Romanian refusal (342). — Russia saves itself from the game (343). — Litvinov proposes Franco-Russian military conversations (344). — Coulondre-Litvinov conversations (344). — What will France do if the U.S.S.R. attacks Poland? (344). — Litvinov torpedoes the Franco-Russian conversations (344). — Bonnet's refusal to take a position against Poland (345). — The solution of the problem is not in Moscow but in London (345). — Chamberlain has never doubted it (345).

XVII. — Lord Runciman's mission to Prague (3 August–10 September 1938) 346

Chamberlain’s speech at Scarborough (8 April 1938) (346). — Chamberlain and Halifax decide to send a mediator to Prague (347). — Wiedemann’s visit to London (348). — London pressures Beneš to accept Lord Runciman’s arrival (349). — Beneš is horrified (350). — Hodža convenes the Council of Ministers (351). — The Czech Cabinet accepts (352). — Chamberlain announces Runciman’s departure in the House of Commons (26 July 1938) (352). — Beneš bows (353). — Arrival of Lord Runciman in Prague (3 August 1938) (353). — First interview with the Sudeten chiefs (353). — Letter from Runciman to Halifax (10 August 1938) (354). — Instructions from Halifax to Runciman (18 August

[[PDF page 530]]

1938) (354). — Laborious discussions by Runciman (355). — Beneš takes back from Hodža the direction of the negotiations (355). — Interviews of Beneš with Kundt and Sebekovský (24–25 August 1938) (353). — The S.d.P. puts itself in a state of legitimate defense (356). — Beneš’s Plan III (357). — New interview of Beneš with Kundt and Sebekovský (3 September 1938) (357). — The Sudeten chiefs reject Plan III (358). — Beneš’s Plan IV (358). — Henlein leaves for the Nuremberg Congress (358). — Plan IV will never be discussed (358). — Failure of the Runciman mission (358). — Report by Lord Runciman to Lord Halifax (16 September 1938) (358). — Reaction of British ruling circles (359).

XVIII. — The crisis enters its acute phase (3–15 September 1938) 361
Hitler simplifies and dramatizes the situation (361). — New military conference at the Berghof (3 September 1938) (363). — The plan for the invasion of Czechoslovakia takes shape (363). — Frontal attack or pincer operation? (365). — The Nuremberg Congress (5–12 September 1938) (366). — Last military conference (9–10 September 1938) (367). — Halder’s objections to the invasion plan advocated by Hitler (368). — Hitler maintains his orders (369). — Halder’s discontent (370). — Observations by Keitel and Jodl (370). — Beneš’s speech (10 September 1938) (371). — Hitler’s speech (12 September 1938) (372). — The Prague Government invites Frank to resume discussion of Plan IV (374). — Frank’s ultimatum to Prague (375). — Prague accepts (375). — The state of siege proclaimed by Prague causes the breaking off of negotiations (13 September 1938) (375). — Henlein’s broadcast appeal (376). — Henlein’s proclamation on Leipzig radio (15 September 1938) (376). — The Czech Government issues an arrest warrant against Henlein (377). — Hitler’s anger (377). — General Halder observes the situation (378). — He plans a coup de force to arrest Hitler (380). — Chamberlain meditates at Downing Street (380). — He seeks a means to divert the catastrophe (381). — He asks Hitler to receive him (382). — Disarray of the German military conspirators (383). — “Everything succeeds for Hitler!” (383).

XIX. — Neville Chamberlain’s journey to Berchtesgaden (15 September 1938) 384
Chamberlain flies to Munich (384). — Arrival in Munich (385). — The crowd acclaims him (385). — Journey from Munich to the Berghof (385). — Dialogue with Hitler (386). — The right of peoples to dispose of themselves (388). — Chamberlain threatens to break off the conversation (388). — Hitler’s anxiety (388). — Chamberlain proposes to come back to see him (389). — The Chancellor and the Prime Minister part

[[PDF page 531]]

(389). — Chamberlain’s interview with Sir Horace Wilson and William Strang (389). — Ribbentrop

opposes the drafting of minutes (389). — Chamberlain returns to London (390). — A message from Dino Grandi (390).

XX. — The crisis reaches its culminating point (15–22 September 1938) 391
Démarche by Georges Bonnet in London (391). — Chamberlain convenes the British Cabinet and gives an account of his journey (391). — Prague must cede the Sudeten lands to the Reich (392). — Beneš begins to let out slack (392). — He proposes to cede certain “salients” (392). — Beneš sends M. Nečas to Paris and London (393). — Consequences of this démarche (394). — Second visit by Daladier and Bonnet to London (18 September 1938) (395). — Daladier-Chamberlain discussion (395). — Daladier asks England to guarantee, with France, the new frontiers of Czechoslovakia (397). — Deliberations of the British Cabinet (397). — England accepts (397). — Daladier will submit the agreement to the Council of Ministers (397). — Chamberlain’s disappointment (397). — The French Council of Ministers accepts the Franco-British plan (398). — Franco-British summons to Prague (19 September 1938) (399). — Divisions within the French Cabinet (401). — Division within French opinion (402). — Partisans of war and partisans of conciliation (402). — In London, the opposition stirs (403). — Churchill’s journey to Paris (403). — Churchill’s conversations with Herriot, Mandel, and Reynaud (403). — Churchill’s advice (404). — Mandel telephones Beneš to advise firmness (404). — The German press unleashes itself (405). — New proclamation by Henlein (17 September 1938) (405). — Formation of the Sudeten Free Corps (406). — Speech by Sebekovský at Dresden (406). — Henlein pushes the Slovak autonomists to demand their independence (406). — Mussolini comments on the Nuremberg speech (407). — The Duce’s speech at Trieste (18 September 1938) (408). — A Hungarian delegation arrives at the Berghof (20 September 1938) (409). — Hitler pushes the Hungarians to demand their minorities with greater intransigence (409). — Hitler-Lipski interview (410). — Lipski’s report (410). — Poland’s desiderata (411). — The Polish notes of 21 September 1938 (412). — The Hungarian note to Prague of 22 September 1938 (412). — Anti-Czech demonstrations in Warsaw and Budapest (413). — The Franco-British note is delivered to Prague (413). — The Czech Government shuts itself up in the Hradčany to deliberate (413). — Visit of Łukasiewicz to Bonnet (413). — Interview between Léon Noël and Colonel Beck (414). — First message from Lacroix (415). — Arrival of Sir Eric Phipps at the Quai d’Orsay (415). — Second message from Lacroix (416). — Silence of the Czech Government (416). — Refusal by the Czech Government (417). — Third message from

Lacroix: “Do not consider the answer definitive” (418). — Hodža asks London and Paris to affirm “that they will not march” (418). — Daladier, Bonnet, Léger, Henry conference (419). — Prague calls Paris by telephone (419). — The French reply (420). — Bonnet calls President Lebrun at Rambouillet (420). — Lebrun gives his agreement (420). — Bonnet sends new instructions to M. Lacroix (421). — Dramatic session of the Czech Council of Ministers (421). — New silence from Prague (421). — The state of minds has changed (421). — Prague accepts the Franco-British proposals (422). — It consents to cede the Sudeten lands to the Reich (422). — Bonnet and Halifax heave a sigh of relief (423).

XXI. — The Godesberg interview (22–24 September 1938) 424
Chamberlain leaves again for Germany (424). — Hitler comes halfway (424). — The Prime Minister lands in Cologne (424). — Arrival at Godesberg (425). — Chamberlain sets out his point of view (426). — “That will not do at all” (426). — Hitler demands that the occupation of the Sudeten territories take place immediately (426). — Chamberlain’s indignation (426). — Hitler maintains his positions (427). — Chamberlain withdraws to the Petersberg (427). — Hitler’s motives (427). —

Written message from Chamberlain to Hitler (429). — Hitler's reply (430). — The ferry crosses the Rhine (430). — Schmidt hands Chamberlain Hitler's reply (431). — Chamberlain's reply (431). — The British delegation returns to Godesberg (432). — Hitler's memorandum (432). — Chamberlain refuses to transmit it to Prague (435). — Announcement of Czech mobilization (436). — Hitler makes a concession (436). — Hitler speaks privately with Chamberlain (437). — The British delegation leaves Godesberg (437).

XXII. — Europe on the edge of the abyss (24–28 September 1938) 438
Europe under arms (438). — Enthusiasm in the German districts of Bohemia (439). — Members of the Sudeten Party provide the police service (439). — Scenes of anger and despair in Prague (440). — More than one hundred thousand people demand the resignation of the government (440). — M. Hodža resigns (441). — General Syrový forms a Cabinet of National Union (441). — Hodža continues to handle current affairs (441). — Beneš's speech on the radio (22 September 1938) (442). — Beneš's plan (442). — Anxiety of MM. Hodža and Beran (443). — Declaration by M. Krofta (25 September 1938) (443). — The Godesberg memorandum is handed to the Czechs (444). — The Czech Government rejects it (444). — Chamberlain returns to London (24 September 1938) (445). — Message from the World Jewish Congress (445).

[[PDF page 533]]

— Council of Ministers in Paris (446). — Daladier and Bonnet leave for London (25 September 1938) (448). — Daladier rejects Hitler's memorandum (448). — Daladier is subjected to a rolling fire of questions (449). — General Gamelin is called for consultation (450). — Daladier and Bonnet withdraw to the French embassy (451). — Message from Lacroix (451). — Message from Sarraut: no gas masks! (451). — Second Daladier-Chamberlain conference in Gamelin's presence (452). — Firm attitude of the generalissimo (452). — Chamberlain decides to send Sir Horace Wilson to Berlin (453). — What Wilson will say to Hitler (453). — Daladier and Bonnet take note of it (453). — Return of the French ministers to Paris (453). — Visit of Sir Eric Phipps to the Quai d'Orsay (453). — Bonnet puts him up against the wall (454). — "What aid can England bring to France?" (454). — Phipps can give no assurance (454). — Message from Beneš to Mościcki (26 September 1938) (454). — Cold reply from Mościcki (455). — Visit of Lipski to Ribbentrop (455). — Poland remains faithful to its note of 21 September (455). — Potemkin threatens Poland (455). — Haughty reply of Colonel Beck (456). — Letter from Attlee to Chamberlain (456). — Churchill's intervention at Downing Street (456). — He pleads for the "Grand Alliance" (456). — Sir Robert Vansittart's communiqué (456). — Litvinov's pessimism (457). — Beneš asks two questions of the Soviet chargé d'affaires in Prague (458). — Trojanovsky takes shelter behind the League of Nations (458). — The Czech General Staff informs Beneš that resisting Germany alone would be suicide for Czechoslovakia (458). — Litvinov does not himself bring the matter before the League of Nations (459). — Article 11 of the Geneva Pact (459). — Litvinov's speech before the 6th Commission of the League of Nations (459). — Questions by the British delegates to Litvinov (460). — Evasive replies by Litvinov (460). — Sir Horace Wilson flies to Berlin (461). — Hitler-Sir Horace Wilson interview (461). — Hitler storms (461). — Wilson asks the Chancellor to receive the Czech negotiators (462). — Hitler gives them until 28 September to present themselves (462). — Hitler's speech at the Sportpalast (26 September 1938) (462). — He violently attacks Beneš (462). — Hitler gives Keitel the order to mobilize five more divisions (464). — The Vansittart communiqué is brought to the Führer (465). — The diplomatic corps considers war inevitable (465). — Chamberlain's nocturnal speech (465). — The Prime Minister instructs Sir Horace Wilson to have a second interview with Hitler (465). — England is ready to guarantee the execution of promises already made by Prague (465). — Second Hitler-Sir Horace Wilson interview (27 September

1938) (466). — Hitler refuses to hear anything (466). — Declaration by Sir Horace Wilson (467). — Sir Horace Wilson leaves the Chancellery (467). — “Now the situation is clear” (467). — Military parade through the streets of Berlin (27 September 1938) (467). — Anxious reaction of the crowd (468). — Chamberlain receives

[[PDF page 534]]

Sir Horace Wilson (469). — The Prime Minister sends a message to Beneš placing him before his responsibilities (469). — Second message from Chamberlain to Beneš (470). — Beneš remains inflexible (470). — New speech by Chamberlain on the radio (471). — “England will not put its existence at stake for Czechoslovakia” (471). — Hitler’s final message to Chamberlain (472). — Roosevelt’s appeal to Hitler (28 September 1938) (472). — The President of the United States proposes a conference (473). — Feverish activity at Downing Street and the Quai d’Orsay (474). — The British Time Table and the Bonnet plan (474). — England and the United States ask Mussolini to intervene as mediator (474). — Visit by François-Poncet to the Chancellery (28 September 1938) (475). — Moving François-Poncet-Hitler interview (475). — Attolico brings a message from Mussolini (476). — Hitler agrees to delay the beginning of operations by twenty-four hours (477). — New message from Chamberlain to Hitler (477). — Hitler-Mussolini telephone conversation (478). — Attolico brings a second message from the Duce (478). — Hitler accepts the principle of a conference (479). — Hitler invites Mussolini, Chamberlain, and Daladier to come confer with him at Munich (479). — Chamberlain gives a speech before the House of Commons (28 September 1938) (479). — Hitler’s invitation is transmitted to him (480). — He informs the members of the House of it (480). — “God bless the Prime Minister!” (480). — Roosevelt’s satisfaction (481). — The crowd acclaims Chamberlain and Mussolini (481).

XXIII. — The Munich Conference (29–30 September 1938) 482
Hitler goes to Kufstein to welcome Mussolini (482). — Interview between the two dictators (482). — Chamberlain and Daladier arrive in Munich (483). — Arrival of the Czech delegation (483). — It remains outside the discussion (483). — Arrival of the Hungarian delegation (484). — First session of the Conference (485). — “What will become of the cows?” (485). — Hitler’s opinion of Daladier (486). — Mussolini proposes a “compromise draft” (486). — It is the German plan (486). — Chamberlain and Daladier approve it (486). — Lunch break (486). — The discussion resumes (487). — The conversation is animated but disjointed (487). — Hitler invites his guests to dinner (487). — Chamberlain and Daladier excuse themselves (487). — The banquet without guests (487). — Third session (487). — The text of the agreement is finalized (487). — The Munich Agreement (487). — Annex I (488). — Annex II (490). — General Bodenschatz’s reflection (490). — The Agreement is signed (490). — The Czechs are informed (490). — Daladier and Chamberlain leave the Führerbau (492). — They are acclaimed by the Munich crowd (492). — Chamberlain’s message to Beneš (493). — The Czechoslovak Cabinet bows (493). — Krofta’s declaration (493). — Broadcast message by General Syrový (494). — “We are alone!” (494). — Admiral Kolchak’s cry (495). — The Polish ultimatum (495). — Chamberlain has another private interview with Hitler (495). — The Anglo-German declaration (496). — Hitler signs it (496). — Hitler and Chamberlain part (496).

[[PDF page 535]]

XXIV. — Europe on the morrow of Munich 497
Chamberlain lands at Heston (30 September 1938) (497). — He goes to the King (497). — Ovations at

Downing Street (497). — “Peace for our time” (498). — Message from Lord Weir (498). — Message from Marshal Smuts (498). — Thousands of letters (499). — Daladier arrives at Le Bourget (500). — The crowd awaits him (500). — He fears being lynched (500). — Triumphal return to Paris (500). — The French Council of Ministers votes congratulations to Daladier and Bonnet (501). — Enthusiasm of the press (501). — The Munich Agreements are ratified (502). — Some voices express reservations (503). — Hitler’s discontent (503). — Churchill’s speech (5 October 1938) (505).

XXV. — The Wehrmacht occupies the Sudeten lands (1–21 October 1938) 506
Hitler orders General von Brauchitsch to occupy the Sudeten lands (506). — The advance guards of the Wehrmacht cross the German-Czech frontier (506). — The populations rush to meet the German soldiers (507). — Hitler’s address at Eger (507). — The Führer’s address at Karlsbad (507). — Zones II, III, and IV are occupied within the prescribed deadlines (507). — The entire Czechoslovak fortified system is dismantled (508). — Konrad Henlein dissolves the Sudeten Free Corps (508). — The chief of the S.d.P. explains how the attachment of the Sudeten lands to the Reich will take place (508). — Hitler’s letter to General von Brauchitsch (508). — Reply of General von Brauchitsch (510). — A law officializes the reincorporation of the Sudetens into the Reich (510). — The “supplementary elections” for the Reichstag (4 December 1938) (510). — Count of the votes (510). — The Sudeten affair is settled (510).

Table of maps 511

[[PDF page 537]]

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